

# MACABRE CADAVER

*A Magazine of Speculative Fiction, Art and poetry*

Issue 1, August 2008

ISSN 1942-8693



Alexander Salas      Emmanuel Paige      Jeff Woodward

L.B. Goddard      Jon Bautz

Stepp Cemetery: A Dying Legend

LadyParasyte: The Macabre Cadaver Premier Edition Interview

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Welcome to the premier edition, Issue 1, August 2008 of Macabre Cadaver, a monthly online magazine that publishes speculative fiction, art, and poetry. This issue contains five stories from new writers, two articles, and a featured artist. Plans are in the works for a printed edition of Macabre Cadaver, so after a few online issues have been published, we will be working toward getting into print, perhaps on a bimonthly or quarterly schedule. Although Macabre Cadaver is a free online magazine at this time, we hope to be able to pay contributing authors and artists in the future. This PDF edition is a little rough around the edges because time was of the essence and there was a lack of images and photos available to process in the allotted time frame. The next issue should look a little better than this one. Hopefully it is still readable. We look forward to hearing from writers and readers alike. Thank you for visiting Macabre Cadaver. Enjoy.

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**Publisher/Executive Editor**

Emmanuel Paige

**Contributing Editor**

Jeff Woodward

**Cover Design**

Emmanuel Paige

**Interior Illustrations and Photographs**

Lydia Braun (pg. 18, pgs. 51-56)

Emmanuel Paige (pgs. 6, 10, 30)

V. Fouche (pg. 24)

**Macabre Cadaver Logo Font (Nosfer) by:**

Eric Oehler

[www.nulldevice.com](http://www.nulldevice.com)

ISSN 1942-8693

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## *Non-Fiction*

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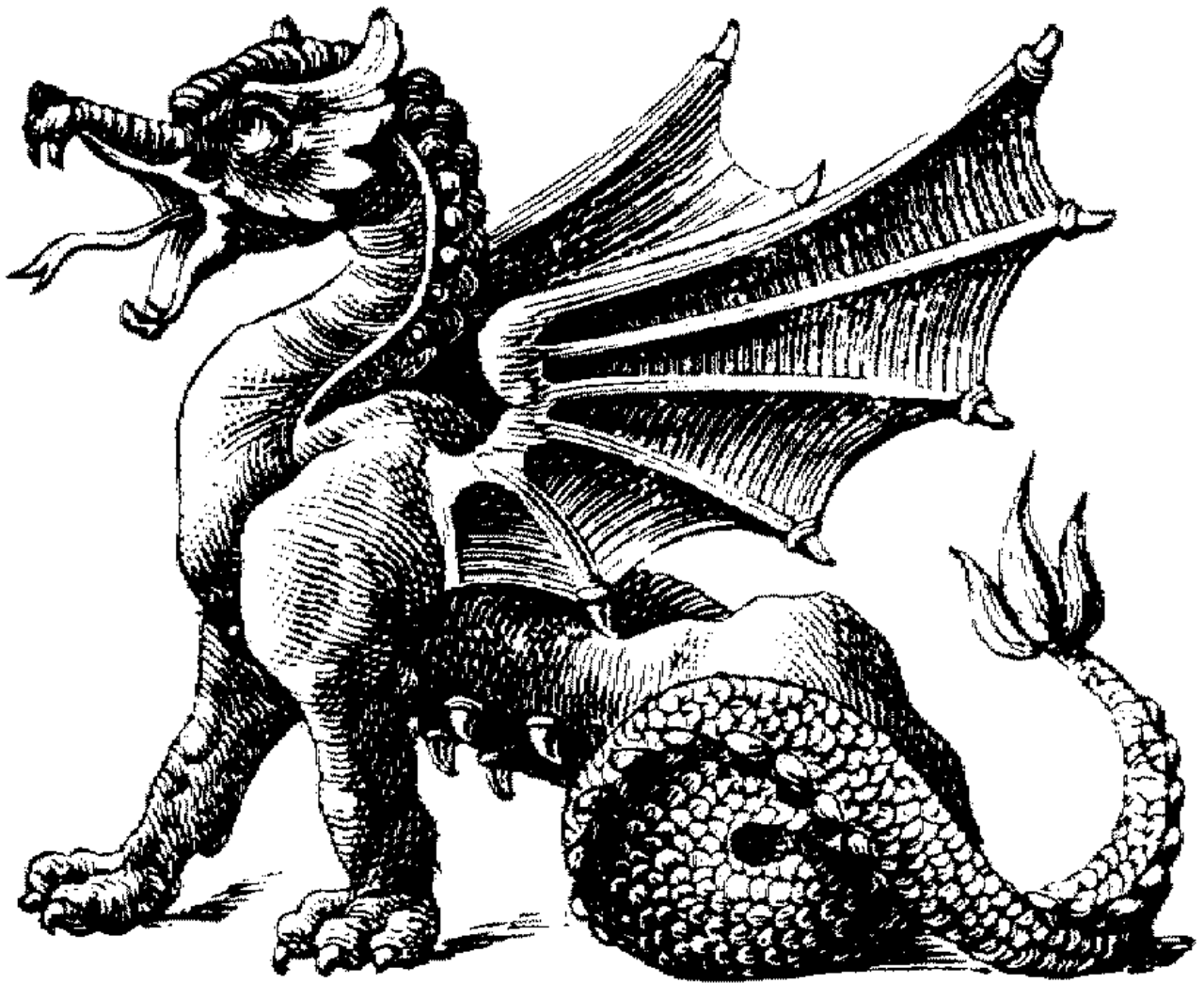
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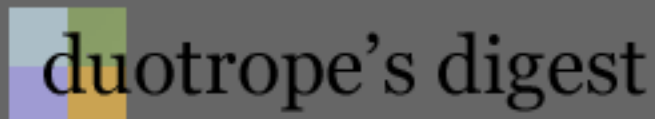
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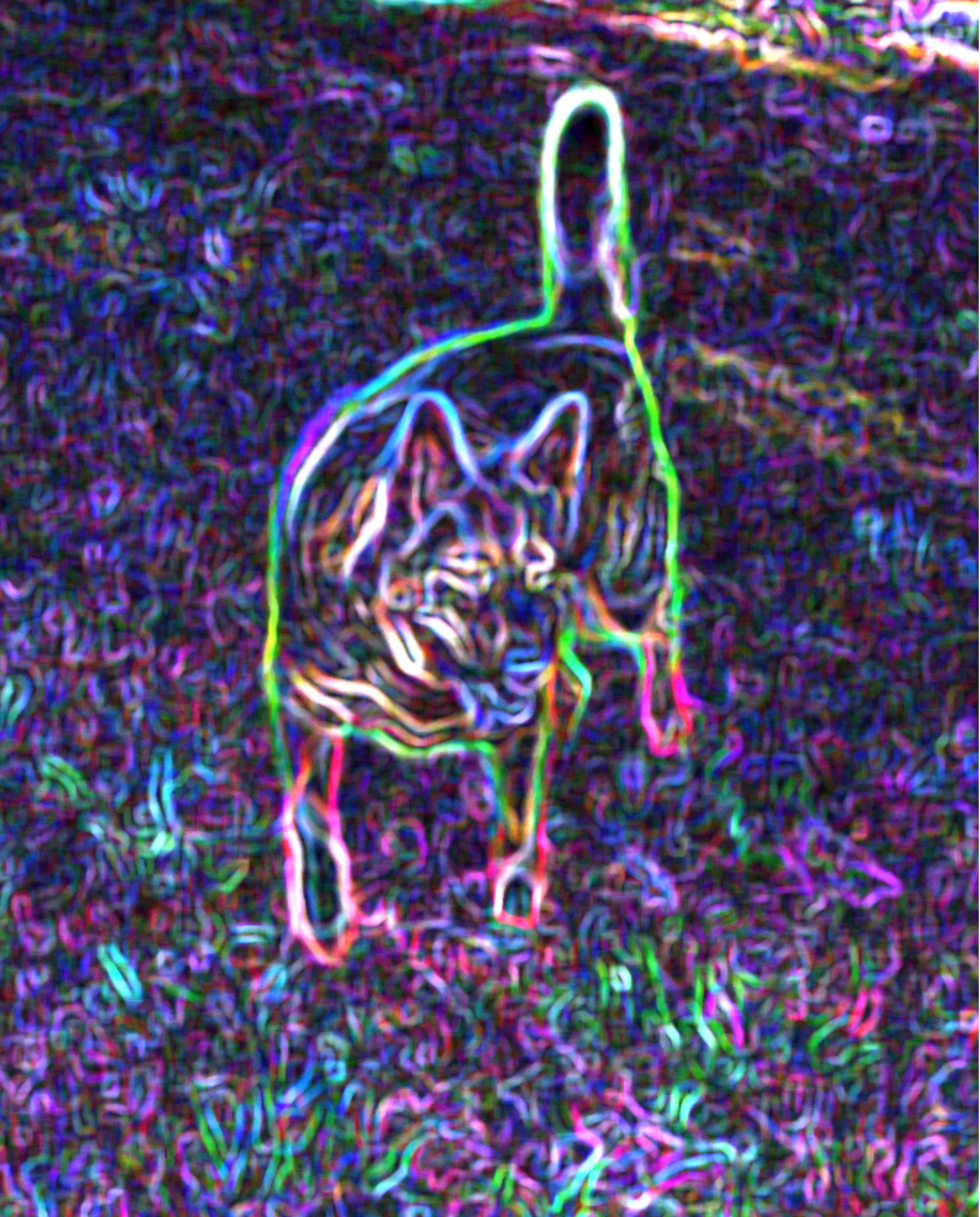
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# Nature, Just Nature

by Alexander Salas



THE ODOR PUNCHED ME harder than a Mike Tyson right cross. My knees buckled, my head spun and my eyes watered as the stench raced up my nostrils.

I gagged. I tasted last night's pepperoni pizza. My stomach decided to expel my supper through the same tunnel it had entered. A volcano of yesterday's dinner neared eruption. A second gag halted the nutriment lava from erupting out of my mouth.

The lump in my throat was massive, like a live gopher taking a break from burrowing out of me. I massaged my neck downwards with both hands and swallowed the digested meal. I swore off pizza for life.

I gathered myself and stared at the mess King made. The Great Dane's diarrhea looked like somebody built a mud bath in my living room.

That's all I could take. I ran upstairs to get my gun.

"King . . . King . . . King . . ."

King did not respond, though I must say I wasn't surprised. I believed that there was no way a man; beast or dog could survive such a bowel movement.

I got to my bedroom and reached under my pillow for my .44. What I pulled out was King's electric dog collar. How in the hell did he get this off?

Just as my mind contemplated the question, King's massive jaws latched onto my arm. The pain bolted up and down my spine faster than it takes electricity to travel from a wall socket to a light bulb.

"No King . . . No!"

I shook my arm, but King clamped down with enough force to drive me to my knees. His choppers dug deeper and deeper till they scraped bones.

I let go of the collar, figuring that's what he wanted. King slowly released pressure and seemed to smile evilly showing off his crimson stained pearly whites.

My arm looked like shredded beef. Several pieces of skin hung on in desperation. For the third time that day I gagged.

My head throbbed and tears flowed freely. What the hell is going on?

Standing as tall as the Trojan Horse, King stood over me. The jet-black spots splattered on King's white coat made him look like a giant Dalmatian. And believe me when I tell you this, King would not be confused with any of those cuddly Disney Dalmatians you see in the movies.

King eyed me. If looks could kill . . . well . . . this monstrous Great Dane slayed me a thousand times.

Every hair on my body stood at attention as King let out a low, frightening guttural growl. I froze staring at man's best friend.

And let me tell you, for seven years, man, for seven fucking years I owned him and it was like; I was only really seeing him for the very first time . . . an animal that yearned.

King's yearning scared the shit out of me, almost. I squeezed my asshole and prayed my insides would hold on and stop me from shitting myself. King's nostrils flared as he breathed in my fear and enjoyed my cowardice aroma.

With his snout he pointed to the collar. And I knew. Don't ask me how I knew, but I just did.

I struggled (with only one good arm) to fit the collar around my neck.

King spoke. Not like you and I, no sir not like us at all. He barked like any other dog on this planet. But I knew what he was communicating to me. Again, don't ask me how I knew, but it's like, oh I don't know, not déjà vu, no, no . . . what am I thinking of, hmm . . . ESP . . . no, no that's not it at all, hold on, it'll come to me . . .

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telepathy, yeah that's it, telepathy. Well . . . maybe not telepathy, hell I don't know, but alls I can say is I understood King's barking.

King's communication was perfectly clear. I became his pet from that moment on.

. . . So here I sit in the middle of my backyard. How much of a shock can this electric collar give? Will it knock me down? How long will it take King to notice me flopping around on the ground like a fish out of water? Should I just take off the collar?

I look up in time to see Thor, my neighbor's Pit Bull, yanking my neighbor out of his back door on a leash, and I suddenly think we're fucked.







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# The Greathouse Tree

by Jon Bautz



IT WAS A TUESDAY WHEN Red came over. I was sitting on the front porch just watching the day when his niece's sporty little Datsun came pulling in off county road 437 and made the climb up my old rut drive. She babied it up nice and easy like and parked behind my '67 Oldsmobile, a car that hasn't moved for three years now.

I just held my chair as she climbed out and went around the other side to open his door. Red don't get out so well these days and more than not he just sits in his old rocking armchair staring off into space between sleeps. Not that he got his brain too far befuddled, but a few months back he just went quiet.

Well, his kids were pretty upset at first, but when they realized he was just taken silent and could still talk and still say what he thought and still think mostly straight, they just kind of backed off. I guess mostly he's just been ruminating on something or other that they wouldn't understand anyways ever since he had that stroke.

Anyhow, there he was, leaning on his niece's arm and shuffling up my lawn with his oak cane helping support his leg on the side away from Denise. I just studied on him, wondering what must be bringing him out in his condition. There wasn't no point in telling him hello till he got up to the porch and found a seat. Hell, the rate he was going it seemed like it would take five or ten minutes to cover that twenty odd yards. So naturally, I got up out of my own seat and hitched one of the late wife's old cane armchairs over next to the swing where I'd been sitting and watching over the last quarter inch of growing that the grass had done.

Well, he got there eventually, I helped him the last mite of the way once on the porch and sent Denise inside for the lemonade. I told her to help herself to whatever she could find that seemed fitting for a young woman like herself and she just laughed. Said nobody hadn't called her young in a

long time.

Red just sat in his seat, staring out across my vista without speaking while we listened to her through the screen door. His hands shook, I noticed, and his face was all slack and turkey waddle, his eye whites gone yellow and sick. I hadn't seen him but once after his stroke and probably I was right not to bother him. Man needs some time after something like that.

Anyway, we sat drinking lemonade after Denise came back and she told me about her son making the grade in college. Gonna be a lawyer one day. Maybe. I didn't say nothing to her but I never did expect that boy to amount to much, kind of wondered whether he was gonna make it past his freshman year over to Miami University.

After about fifteen minutes of her prattle and my gee hawing, Red laid his hand on Denise's wrist and when she turned around to him, he just stared at her for a moment. When she asked what he wanted he just told her maybe she ought to run back to town and send one of her teenage boys out to get him sometime around after supper. Well, she didn't want to at first but he was done talking and when she turned to me for support, I just held my hands up and shook my head.

He waited until she got in her car. He waited after that till she was out on 437. When that Datsun disappeared around the bend by the Johnstone farm he still didn't say nothing, didn't even look at me, just kept staring like he could still see that car through the trees and the rock roots of the hills she was on the other side of. Finally, he turned around and gave me a long stare with them yellow eyes, sucked the spit back from the corners of his mouth and sipped lemonade.

"I s'pose you remember the day Johnny died." He finally said.

I nodded my head. Sure I remembered it. We'd all been



down to the Greathouse Tree on Johnny's dad's farm. Johnny, Red, and myself were geared up and ready to cut that sumbitch down when Johnny bought it. It wasn't exactly right of us to fell that old giant and we knew it.

That old sycamore is the area's one claim to fame, but not something I suppose many people would know about. Hell, I didn't know about it till I moved out here and even when I learned of it I had to go to the library and read up on it some before I really knew what it was.

According to the county archives, that was the tree where Chief Logan tied off Jacob Greathouse's guts and made him walk them out in a circle till he died. It said when he was found it looked like he had kept going so long he didn't die till his stomach pulled out through the cut in his belly. Not that I felt bad for the man.

He was supposed to be a trapper and I guess he was. Back in them days when trappers and lumber surveyors were the first ones going out to map the wilderness, he was one of the biggest and meanest sons of bitches there was.

I read that he come across a few Delaware women and their young down on The Big Sandy and beat them to death with his rifle, swinging it like an axe and cracking their skulls open. I suppose they were some kin to Logan, maybe not though. Could be he just didn't take well to seeing women and children killed.

Well anyhow, that's probably all somebody would need to know on that story to guess why the Historical Preservation Society got an order from the state declaring the tree a landmark. I can't see myself how a person would be able to tell whether that was really the right tree or not, but its got the state's seal of approval.

"Yeah I remember." I said. "What about it?"

"I been thinking on it. Thinking on Johnny and what I seen that day." I set back in my swing, looked him over hard and turned my head to spit my disgust over the porch rail into the lilac bushes growing up alongside where we sat.

"Remember what happened to Johnny?" He asked.

"Of course I would. I was there wasn't I?"

The way he looked at me, almost smiling but not quite getting the corners of his mouth turned up, froze me in my chair. Something ran up the back of my neck, not really a shiver, but something that made the hairs stand on edge. He just shook his head at me.

"I suspect you would know. Thing is, it ain't a thing a man would ever really talk about in his life is it?"

Now I was a little more than jittery. I was mad because there had been a lot of speculation around town after Johnny had died and it had taken years for it to die out with

the population. Hell, it's why I moved out of town into the country where I didn't have to see folks looking at me every day.

"So what the hell does that mean?" Now he did smile, and it wasn't evil, in fact, there was no malice in him whatsoever. He held his hand out. Be easy.

"Sorry Jim. I should have knowed better than to say it like that. I remember what you went through. Hell didn't we both go through the same shit?"

"So what do you mean then?" I asked.

He sighed, looked away from me and down the sloping scrub field I called my front forty and past the road over the knoll of Hutchison's farm to where the woods started that held the giant sycamore. The Greathouse Sycamore the tin plaque nailed to its hide said.

"Say it takes a lonely place for a ghost to haunt."

Something shifted back there in my thoughts, back where I keep all the odds and ends. Hair stood out on my arms and for just a second I thought I might get angry enough to do some fool thing like strike Red across the mouth. He was watching me. Probably he knew something about what I was thinking because he shifted away from me, arms trembling. He wasn't scared though, just attentive.

"You know what I'm speaking on?" He asked. I looked away from him then and reached into the front pocket of my bib overalls and laughed. I hadn't smoked for three years, not since I'd had that bypass surgery back in seventy-four.

"Here Jim." When I turned my face around he was shaking a Winston out of a crumpled pack.

"I thought you couldn't smoke no more."

"Bah! You seen me?" And we both laughed at that.

Maybe our kids wouldn't think it was funny, him with his stroke a few months back and still smoking, me sitting there laughing as he struck a blue-tip with his thumb and lit my cigarette. But hell, what do they know about living (buddy I said LIVING) that last Saturday of August. Only for us, me and Red, it wasn't school bells on Monday. It was harps.

So we sat there smoking and staring down over Hutchison's field and thinking our own thoughts while we sipped lemonade and didn't talk. After a bit, I got up and went in the house to make coffee.

When I came back out Red had dozed off so I let him be. The wind was blowing off the top of Deercreek ridge to our west and it felt good in the July heat. Out in the scrub in front of the house a rabbit sat chewing the greens and I

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watched him a while.

Soon enough my thoughts went ticking back to fifty-six and that night with Red and Johnny over on Hutchison's farm. Only back then it wasn't Hutchison that owned it, it was Johnny's dad, and I suppose we had a right to be there.

What killed Johnny Derks started back in 1954. That was when the State Historical Preservation Society filed with the Statehouse to begin holding an annual frontier convention and reenactment weekend at the Greathouse Tree.

Seems one of their own had won some renown for a paper he wrote on Jacob Greathouse and his explorations. In honor of the National Historical Society's award he received, they thought it only fitting to reward him with a convention based off his research.

Well that was all fine, but what they wanted from Johnny's dad was that he set aside an acre or two for the festival out in the open field, near the edge of the woods, where he grew his corn. And I suppose that would have been fine too if they would have agreed on his terms.

He offered to sign papers that would allow them an easement to develop a drive to the site. And for the use of the acreage for their camping and parking and vending if they would pay him the losses.

Well, now, I don't really understand exactly why that wasn't so agreeable to them. Sure they would pay him, the same every year, inflation considered. But what they offered, he had said many nights down at the River Room Pub, wasn't worth half the yield of that acreage.

So he hadn't signed papers with them. Well, you would have thought that would be the end of that but it wasn't. It seems they thought he was trying to rook them and that being not much more than an ignorant farmer, they figured they'd just kind of jump over his head and go get orders from the county.

Well, his was about the oldest family in the area and regardless of what the society thought of Matthew Derks, his name carried weight at the county courthouse. So the papers were denied and they got sent packing.

Everybody in town thought it was over until they came back in October that year. It seems there were a lot of college professors and some state politicians that belonged to that group and they had friends. Now Derks had friends too, some in fairly high places in the county, but that didn't mean squat when the governor showed up at the courthouse.

There in front of everybody, he issued an order that the

event would be held starting the following year in June and that due to the disagreeable nature of Derks' position in the matter, he would receive no compensation for the first two years.

Well, there was a lot of grumbling and not too many people were pleased. The County Commissioner issued a statement to the effect that he did not recognize the validity of the Governor's decree and the State be damned!

June came around the following year and here they come. Derks had gone ahead and planted that acreage anyway on the sheriff's promise that he would keep them fools off his farm. It didn't matter. When the sheriff and his six deputies turned away the first arrivals at the site and wouldn't allow them to set up shop there had been phone calls.

The governor showed up again and still the sheriff and his men stayed put. I got to hand it to them, they stuck by their people and God love 'em, they gave it hell. In the end, however, it was the money and the power that won out.

When the sheriff had laid a restraining hand on the governor's shoulder all hell broke loose. There were state troopers he had brought with him and they arrested the sheriff. When the deputies tried to intervene with the arrest there was a scuffle and two of them rode along with him, down to their own jail, where they sat for the entire length of the festival before being released without charges brought against them.

It was a hard thing for Matthew to swallow. Not only had he lost the crops under the trampling tires and feet of that crowd, but had seen his friends humiliated trying to stand up for him. I think that probably rankled him most.

All the week of the festival he would just set on his porch at night shaking his head as he stared off toward the woods where you could hear the Indian drums, see the smoke from their fires rising above the trees.

"Seems like a man going to war and fighting for his country ought to mean something." He would mumble. And I knew what he meant, hell, I'd been kicked around a little by Uncle Sam after number two myself. But, in the end, he bore it out.

Now Johnny, that was a different matter. He never did marry and with his mom passed away in fifty-two, he had come home from college and given up his job as a professor to help his dad work the farm. It wasn't just an affront to him personally seeing his farm trampled. He was probably more prideful of his dad than old Matt was of him, which is saying quite a bit. And it sure did rankle him to see the old man whipped.

He sat by through the celebration, but only at his old

man's urging. Had it been to him he would have driven their old Silver King right through the middle of that camp and turned it all under with the plow. You could tell it just by looking at his face when he sat out on the porch, closed mouthed and breathing hard through his nose as he grinded his teeth while them drums went on at night.

Well, that week passed and when the society pulled up stakes and after the last of the organizers had left, he went down to the campsite and took stock of the damage. I was with him that day because I worked evenings over at the farm to help make ends and to see the look on his face as he surveyed that trampled down corn you knew what God must have looked like when he broke loose the floodwaters.

It wasn't five minutes after we got down there in the field truck before we were tearing our way back up the access trail to the equipment barn. Red was doing his inspections on the tractor's then like he did every Monday, giving this chain some grease, or working the grit out of the gears on the John Deere.

Johnny told him to drop his grease can, hook a hay-wagon to the Deere and head down to the campground. He turned to me and told me to round up a couple cans of gas and three chainsaws and I almost walked out on him then. Only I thought of old Matt just sitting there shaking his head and how whipped he had been and then I got good and angry too.

Red, he was a good hand on the farm but he didn't have no idea what was going on because he wasn't really all that bright, so before Johnny and me could get our gear together, he was dropping the hitch on that wagon and easing the tractor down toward the campground.

On the way back down Johnny told me I didn't have to be a part of it. I guess he had cooled off a little and knew what he was doing was like to end him up in some kind of hot water, but damned if he wasn't set on doing it anyway. I let him know then and there that I wasn't backing down and he had turned to me and said even though I'd never hear it, his pop would sure be grateful.

"They say it takes a lonely place for a ghost to haunt."

That's what Red had told me. I cast him a quick look, saw he was still dozing and thought on him for a while. He never was none too bright but like most men, the older he got, the more he knew.

I wondered about all the time he spent silent these days. I'd heard the talk, though not much of it, and figured he must have been doing what men do when we can't do much of nothing else. I suppose he was thinking, ruminat-

ing, as we will on the things in his past he never really understood.

"Seen a lot when I had my stroke, Jim. It was like a door opened up and I got to take a peek through, see what was there t'other side of this life. Course I seen a lot too that I already done but didn't understand."

Red was looking at me and I know he'd been watching me staring off toward the woods over across the fields on the other side of 437. Seems like old men like us get to know each other and the way his statement had been in line with my thoughts didn't startle me. I nodded. He was smiling at me again.

"Think the coffee's done." He said.

So, naturally I fetched us each a cup and came back out to sit on the porch and drink hot coffee on that hot July afternoon while we shared his bent up Winstons and got to talking on the gritty of why he'd come by.

"So you got to thinking on Johnny." I said. Red nodded, sipped his coffee.

"Ayuh."

"So why don't you just out with it then?"

He just sat there a moment, his hands wrapped around that coffee cup. I watched him staring off into the past, maybe thinking on what he'd seen, maybe thinking on what he wanted to say.

"Thing is, Jim, nobody ever called me bright. Hell, I know better than most folks it's true. Even my own kids growing up used to just shake their heads when I tried to help 'em with their homework, used to laugh at me and think they could talk around me when I was standing right there."

I looked away. There had been times I'd done the same thing. Back then I never really thought he had any clue people had been doing that sort of thing to him.

"It's alright I suppose." He commented. "Thing is, maybe a man ain't got to be all that bright to know how things are." I opened my mouth but was silenced by his trembling hand, which he held out toward me.

"See, all I been doing since my stroke is just setting and thinking. Turning stuff over in my mind and looking at it different ways. Been thinking a lot on what folks think they know, what they don't know about.

"Funny thing. I really do believe what the preacher man always said about there being more on heaven and earth than a man could see. Shit Jim, ain't that we can't always see it I don't think. More likely we just got too much life to see what's going on around us, what's walking with us every day, right there, just watching us and wanting what we got.



Hating us.”

“What are you talking about old man?”

“Well, I don’t know what you saw when Johnny died. But I know what I seen. And like as not, I been trying twenty one years to keep it pushed away down inside of me.”

I was staring off over the field again, down toward the woods at Hutchison’s. Not looking for it, but just gazing in the direction of the Greathouse Tree. I nodded slowly.

“I ain’t gonna call you wrong Red. Lord knows maybe I wrote you off too quick too many times in my life for not knowing a squat worth knowing, and that’s a painful thing for me to say.” Now he was nodding, looking away from me as he spoke.

“I s’pose that’s more decent than a lot of folks been to me Jim. More honest anyways.”

“So why don’t you tell me what you’re getting at.”

“Spirits.”

He had turned around and was staring at me, defying me to call him foolish. I didn’t have the mind too though. Right then, it seemed like all his past and all his oafish blunderings didn’t mean a damn, didn’t measure up against the time he’d spent examining his life.

“You just go on now Red. I ain’t gonna have no call to think you unwise.” He smiled at that.

“Well, it’s like this I reckon. Best I can figure is a man gets so busy to living he only knows what’s around him that’s alive. Maybe there’s times when he can see what’s surrounding him but not so much. Maybe as a man gets older, after that first time he sees something of what’s there that usually goes unseen, well . . .”

He held up his hands and faltered. I did him the kindness of excusing myself for a fresh cup of coffee and took his along. When I came back out with both cups filled and handed him his, he drank a little before continuing.

“Older I get, the less life I got in me. Seems more and more that I ain’t just getting closer to passing on, but like I’m leaking out my life and filling up with death. And I think it must be that being dead, being more dead and less alive, you get your eyes peeled back to what’s out there that ain’t alive like we know alive.”

I nodded. It seemed like he’d been puzzling that over for a while and who was I to disagree. Truth be told, I’d been thinking along the same lines for a while myself. I just hadn’t been able to turn it around and look at it like he had, hadn’t been able to put words to the thoughts. I tried then.

“You know Red, I think there’s a lot to what you’re saying. May be something else. Maybe it ain’t just dying

and getting old and closer to going on. Maybe sometimes death’s coming. And maybe . . . well, maybe it’s like there’s a path cleared and some of them things you’re talking about, what ain’t seen, maybe a body could see then, but not understand.” He took it in then nodded his head.

“Something else Jim. When a man ain’t dwelling with it, ain’t just setting and waiting on it, knowing it’s a certainty . . . well, I s’pose if he stumbles across something he don’t understand he just kind of naturally finds a way to see around it, like it ain’t there. Time enough passes and maybe he can’t recall he ever been close to something like that at all, leastways not till he starts being aware his number’s coming up. Maybe not even then.”

I was listening to Red, but my mind had gone wandering away back to fifty-six. Down in them woods across the road, the noon sunlight filtering through the leaves of the forest canopy. Johnny and I had passed Red in the truck and were down there at the tree, pulling the cords on the chainsaws while that old John Deere chugged its way through the field after us.

Neither of the saws wanted to start right off. Them old McCulloughs could be like that. There weren’t any primer pumps back in them days so you had to crank ‘em a few times and if you did it too hard, you flooded the motor. Well, I was bent over with my foot on the peg getting ready to give mine one more crank when something moved a dozen yards off and caught my eye.

I was already nervous as it was, what with the stink them Historical Society people had made about not getting their way about camping, and I figured if somebody was to stumble on to us cutting down a bonafide landmark, well, there’d sure be hell to pay. So I stood up and squinted into the thick forest undergrowth for a bit.

Another movement in the woods, off to the right of where I had first seen something, had me looking around and patting down the hairs on the back of my neck. I turned to look at Johnny, bent over his saw, and there was more movement to my right. I spun around and took a step towards it.

When I had moved about thirty yards away from the Greathouse Tree, I stopped. There, ahead of me, were the dim outlines of a man standing with his naked back to me. I ran a hand over my mouth, uncertain of what to do, and took a step forward. His back stiffened, I could see the back of his head more clearly then, noted the long black hair, the way it seemed to catch the sunlight and throw it off in purple glints. Another step and I stopped.

I could hear Red coming into the woods on the Deere

now, heard him holler something to Johnny and then the woods was filled with the roar of his chainsaw as he got it going. I turned to look back towards them fellas and when I turned around the man I had followed was gone. Just disappeared, although with all the racket from the tractor and the saw, I can't say he had done so without a sound.

"You wandering around them woods?" It was Red, breaking into my thoughts again and when I tore my gaze from those woods across the road and looked at him, he was smiling at me, an ugly, old man smile that was all grim acceptance and fear.

"What did you see? I mean when Johnny died." He passed his trembling hand over his face, looked away and didn't speak for a moment.

I suppose he was thinking on how to tell it. He lit one of his Winstons, shook the pack and looked glumly down at it before offering me one. I lit up with the offered match and returned to staring back over the road, feeling my thoughts drawn back to that day while Red tried to put into words what he had seen.

Like I said, I had heard Red hollering to Johnny and the man in the woods had disappeared. Standing there like a stump I thought it through, heard the motor to the Deere stutter itself off then the whine of the saw biting into the tree.

I cast a look towards them, could make out the Deere and Red but not Johnny. I thought of the man in the woods and decided to go give Johnny a heads up. That's when I heard Red scream for Johnny to look out.

There was a crack followed by a series of snaps and a loud rustling, like an autumn gale tearing through the leaves raked to the burn pile. Johnny screamed and then was cut off. Something crashed to the ground and in the aftermath, the only thing I could really remember hearing was the whine of Johnny's saw as it lay on the ground idling.

Then Red was bellowing like a bull and yelling Johnny's name. I came out of one of my boots as I ran towards them. When I made it through the underbrush and came up on the scene I stopped still for a minute just taking it in, my knees getting weak as I saw Johnny's arm sticking out from under a great limb that had come off the sycamore.

Red was already there, tugging on the fallen limb, screaming for Johnny to answer him. I came up, took hold of the branch with him and we hefted it as high as our knees, staggered forward and drew it up to our stomachs, still going forward. I looked over to Red, saw he was staring up into the tree looking scared and unbelieving.

We had her clear when my foot caught up alongside of

Johnny's leg and I fell, dropping the limb. Red held fast though, took the weight I had let go of and grunted as he heaved it to his chest and pitched it clear.

When it hit the ground I was already kneeling at Johnny's side, leaning my head to his chest to listen for breathing. Red was backing away from the tree and tripped over us, knocking me flat across Johnny's chest and that's when Johnny grabbed my elbow. It was all of a sudden like and it scared me. I'm shamed to say it, but I yelped like a frightened pup before turning to look at his face.

He was shaking bad and when he tried to lift his head he looked like a marionette in a windstorm. I tried to cradle him, take the strain away from his muscles and he shook his head. He opened his mouth like he was going to speak then just coughed, a wet broken wheeze, before closing his eyes and going limp in my arms.

Red, he was standing right there behind me. When I turned around, away from Johnny's face, he was staring up into the tree. I reached out and grabbed onto his pant leg and pulled at it, but he didn't look down.

I told him Johnny was dead three times before he looked away from that tree. When he did look away, he held his hand out and jerked me to my feet. After that he bent down, gathered Johnny in his arms and hustled him over to the hay wagon and pitched him on before jumping up on the tractor and lighting out of them woods up to Old Matt's house.

I was left to just wonder in a stunned stupor over what had just happened. Looking around, I noted the saw marks where Johnny had started his cut, the chainsaws lying on the ground. His was still idling so I shut it off, carried it to the back of the truck and pitched it in. Gathering up my own, I did the same with it before crawling in behind the wheel and heading up to the house after Red.

"Seen something up in that tree?"

I nodded. Thinking back on it just then, remembering how Red had been staring up into the tree, how quiet he had been for weeks afterward, I wasn't surprised. I was unsettled as all get out by the notion, but not surprised. I took a guess.

"Seen a man up there on that limb before it fell huh?" Red nodded his head, studied me.

"You seen it too?"

"No. Not up in the tree. But I was just thinking on it and funny thing is, I guess I had kind of . . . forgot about the man I seen in the woods before it happened." Now Red was leaning forward, them yellow eyes cracked open as far as they would go. I went on.

"Suppose I saw me a Shawnee. Maybe a Delaware. Probably you seen the same thing. Just setting up there, watching the whole thing happen." Red shook his head.

"Not quite. That ain't not quite what I seen."

"Well what then?"

"It was a white man. Big, strong looking fella in a buckskin shirt with a mop of hair and a beefy face. He was all red faced and sweaty. And that ain't all." I leaned over toward Red.

"He was up there chopping that limb with a hatchet."

I settled back in that swing fast. All the air went out of me and, for a second there, all I could see were dots of white in a field of gray. Red was saying something but he sounded like he was on the other end of a tunnel.

I came back around without passing out but felt a mite shaky. Red was struggling to rise from his seat and I lifted my hand to him and shook my head.

"Just set back, I'm fine."

And he did. We sat there like that, like old men, and didn't say a thing between us for some time. When the silence finally quit, it was Red that sent it packing.

"Jacob Greathouse murdered Johnny Derks."

I shook my head, felt myself in that tumbler again and just slumped in my seat. That time I did pass out and when I came to, Red was just setting there, staring down towards them woods.

"Yessir. Said it takes a lonely place for a ghost to haunt. And what lonelier than down in them woods?"

It seemed like he was aware I had woke up. If not, he showed no inclination of answering his own question. I sighed and hefted myself to my feet, felt the ache in my knees as I stood. Holding on to the arm of my chair for support, I looked down at him.

"So why we talking on this?"

"Oh, I don't rightly guess there's any real reason." His shoulders drooped even farther and I hadn't thought it was possible. He let his scrawny little neck go and then his head was slumped forward. I shook his shoulder.

"Red?" He only slumped forward a little more and I shook him again. He felt loose and heavy.

"Red!"

Nothing. I shook him one more time and then he went tumbling out of that chair and onto the porch floor. I took a step back passed my hand over my face and retook my seat.

Turning my face away from him, I looked back over that road, back down to them woods. Something was moving

way down there in the field in front of the woods, through that knee high corn. I stood up and shaded my eyes from the sun a minute, just concentrating on that figure down there.

When it stopped moving away and turned around I saw clearly it was a man, a large man with a barrel chest and an unruly tangle of brown hair on top of his head. He was wearing a buckskin shirt and carrying something. It looked like it could have been a rifle.

He lifted his hand to his brow like I was doing, shading the sun out of his eyes. The wind picked up a bit and that hair started blowing around his head. As I watched, it seemed like the sun went down just on where he was standing, the area around him darkening over from stark sunshine to purple twilight and then gray followed by black. And then . . . well . . . he was gone. Just plain gone.







# A Devil In Disguise

by L.B. Goddard



SARAH IS PLAYING in the wooden sandbox. I watch her for the third time this week. Biting my lip, I'm waiting for a chance to swoop in and play the monster. Strands of soft, black hair fall from her ponytail, dancing in the gentle wind, teasing me. I'd love to feel that hair between my fingers, to run my cheek across the top of her head.

Sarah purses her lips, smoothing the sides of a giant sand castle with her palms. She builds the most elaborate structures—far beyond what you'd expect of her age. She is a tiny sculptor, hands moving with the passionate precision of a seasoned artist, until every curve and dip of her sand-structure is just right. There's something very different about Sarah.

Her cheeks are flush with summer heat. She looks warm to the touch, a thin layer of sweat forming on her brow as she works. I think I can smell her sweat, a salty musk wafting in the breeze. I dig fingernails into my palms. The sudden pain dulls my urge to leap from the car and snatch her up. It's not a good time. Not yet. Her mother is still watching from the porch.

I saw Sarah for the first time three weeks ago, when I was heading home for lunch one afternoon. I was on my way back from the seasoning store, where I buy all my cooking spices. The stoplight flicked from yellow to red. I stopped the car . . . and there she was, playing in the little sandbox.

Her beauty was striking, even from a distance. Eyes so blue, so full of youth, I could see their glow from my car. For a moment I was lost in those cerulean orbs, surrounded by slick, dark lashes. She watched a bird take flight from the fence. Her upturned face was a picture of beauty.

She fell to all fours, wiggling her toes in the sand. She ran a fingertip across the gritty surface, parting the tiny

grains to form a picture. I pulled into the alley of a vacant office building. The worn letters on the sign read "Chiropractor." I didn't know why, but I had to watch her play. I had to get my hands on that child.

The sun was blazing hot, and I could smell her salty sweat, I could taste it in the back of my throat. Her flesh was rosy with heat, pieces of hair sticking to the moisture that formed on the sides of her face. Sweat covered her legs, little pieces of sand stuck to her calves and knees.

Even dirty and perspiring, she was lovely. The face of a cherub angel, eyes big and innocent, coral lips whistling a tune too soft for me to hear. I cursed the chain link fence that surrounds the little yard, the vigil mother who stood watching from the porch.

"Sarah!" called her mother. "Come get a Popsicle."

I watched with interest as Sarah sprang to her feet, dropping her shovel and pale. She ran swiftly to receive her icy treat, beaming from cheek to cheek.

They disappeared into the house, and when they returned, Sarah had a green Popsicle. Her mother had a phone. She lifted Sarah to the patio chair, saying something too soft for me to hear. Probably "Stay put" or "Don't move" or "Be good". Then, she began dialing the phone, walking into the house . . . closing the door.

I wanted Sarah, right then and there, needed her like no words can describe. But it wasn't safe, not just yet. So I would keep watching, biding my time, waiting for the perfect chance.

I know what you're thinking: I'm a pedophile, a freak. You're right about one thing: I'm a freak, that's for sure. But I would never use a child for sex.

I crave Sarah's flesh, the marrow in her bones, the juices that keep her organs soft. It sustains me—young meat—brings strength to my legs, keeps insanity from clouding my mind. It fills the husk of my body with life

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once again, if only for small fractions of time.

I don't take it for granted . . . the magic of the flesh. I am grateful for every last morsel.

Ancient Cherokee tribes worshiped the Corn Woman. She was the bringer of crops and nourishment. The Roman goddess Pomona filled orchards and gardens, watching over the fruits that would sustain a great many. Perhaps even you, as you sit down to the table, clasp your hands in thanks to your god.

I assure you . . . not a piece of young Sarah will be wasted. She is a god, a giver of life.

Her upper skull will be fashioned into an extraordinary bowl, sanded and smoothed to perfection. On its surface, I will chisel an elaborate castle, an offering to the beautiful girl. Her leg bones will decorate my secret lounge, perhaps framing a painting of Sarah. The smaller bones can be used for whistles and jewelry, a hobby I've been honing for years. I prefer not to waste my children.

Sarah's flesh will sustain me for weeks. The younger the meat, the more powerful the effect. My withered skin will be softer to touch. My trembling hands will regain a forgotten dexterity, if only for a few short days. Perhaps some of the wrinkles that surround my ageless eyes will disappear, and I might feel young again.

As you've probably guessed, I'm not a mortal man. Ancient cultures of people, the ones you call "history" . . . those were my family and friends. I can build a fire without matches or lighter. I can find my way home by using the stars. I cannot die of disease, broken bones, or blood loss. Many have tried to end my life. As have I.

I've been burnt to a crisp by angry Puritans, who kicked and spat on my corpse as they extinguished the fire. I've plunged a knife into my heart, again and again . . . even begged a lover to unleash the guillotine. I still remember her face, mouth agape, sheer horror taking over her eyes. The guillotine blade had sliced quickly and smoothly, separating my head from my shoulders, and yet I was still alive. My body and mind went on living, even after my spinal cord severed. I was dazed, unable to control my muscles with the ease of an intact man. I touched the bloody stumps of my neck and head together, and I was mended within a few minutes.

As time passed, I discovered something quite useful. I didn't need to keep my severed parts. I lost a leg, with no hope of recovering the vital limb. Within hours, another one sprouted like a weed from the painful, bloody stump that was left.

Once upon a time, I was even shipwrecked, my vessel tossed by the waves of a stormy sea. I hit the rocky terrain of an island, dense with fog. I was knocked unconscious and drowned. My body drifted deep into the ocean, sucked this way and that by the crashing waves. When I finally came to I was in a dead man's float. That was the longest, and worst, swim of my life. I don't travel near the ocean anymore. The water is too vast, and filled with predators.

My skull has been beaten to a pulp, my brain riddled with splintered bones. My head has been sliced in two, separated right down the nose. Then there was the time I thought I'd die of starvation, refusing to partake of human flesh. I wanted nothing more than to defeat my timeless curse, which has made me a cannibal, a monster. Years passed . . . and yet I could not die. Starved and weak, my mind was fading in and out. Until I summoned the strength to go hunting once more . . . and do what I am destined to do.

Sometimes I wonder if it's impossible to die, though I can see the strain of centuries on my body. My hair is thinning and gray, riddled with bald spots. The pearly teeth of my youth are a distant memory. They went rotten such a long time ago, leaving my gums slick and empty. My joints creak when I move, and sometimes I can feel the first signs of senility sneaking in . . . my mind too full of memories to be sane.

In many ways, I am a devil in disguise. My smile shows the dentures of an elderly mortal. I wear a wig that is purposely cheesy. My nails have grown thick and yellow with time. Dark circles encompass my eyes. I look like an average old man, struggling to deny nature's cruelty.

But will I ever meet the fate of a human? Will my body ever finally give out? Or will I become so useless and weak, I am nothing but a wandering mind?

My hands grip the steering wheel. I watch her digging in the sand. The cravings, the hunger, overwhelm me. That blue-eyed cherub playing across the street is simply too beautiful for words. So young, so full of creativity and life. Her hair glistens in the sun like black chrome. Her skin is baking, ever-so-slightly, the beginnings of a sunburn. I can smell it! It's too tempting for words!

Her mother calls to her. "Sarah! It's time for a Popsicle." My heart races. The time has finally come!

Twice this week, Sarah was given a Popsicle, while her mother placed phone calls from the house. It's the only time she leaves her child unattended. It's my only chance



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to lure her away.

I slide out of the driver's seat, quietly shutting the metal door. I make my way through the empty lot. A plastic bottle crunches under the heel of my boot. The sound makes me jump. I'm too nervous! Am I getting too old for the hunt?

What if her mother sees me, or a man of the law? My knees will give out if I try to run! My ancient lungs will collapse, short of breath in ten steps! A sudden fall might badly injure my age-old bones. Sure, I mend quickly, but it takes a few minutes. I'd be in hand cuffs before the wounds healed. And what about prison? I'd be denied human meat! Forced into starvation, a skeletal monster, an empty husk with an undying brain.

Why is Sarah worth all of this trouble? Why not hunt an easier prey? I'll tell you why. The reason is simple:

I've watched a millennium pass. For years I've been swimming in a sea of faces—some of them friends, some lovers, some foes—but not a single face as lovely as the child before me. Not a single memory compares to the beauty I see now. It calls to me, that splendid little face.

I don't wait for the stoplight to flash a "Walk" signal. I scan for cars, and swiftly cross the street.

I am standing in a restaurant alley, close enough to a rusty dumpster to smell the wasted food. Such a pity. I never waste my food. I look around. There's not much traffic on the road. Two cars pass under the light, traveling in different directions. Most importantly . . . I see no police.

I'm partially hidden from the main road by an overgrown shrub. Unruly branches twist around the street sign, its leaves growing over the words. I hear Sarah softly humming a tune. I start to close my eyes and get lost in her sweet voice, but I'm quickly distracted by the urgency of my task. I've got to get up there and lure her away. Whisper sweet nothings into her mind. Tell her to follow me. I've got to hold that child in my arms . . . and take her home.

The veins in my neck are threatening to burst, unable to contain the wild beating of my heart. I don't suppose it would matter if they did burst . . . Well, it wouldn't matter in the grand scheme of things.

There is a gentle slope of hill between the alley and the fence. I swallow hard and take a breath, it comes out shaky. Cautiously, I begin to climb the hill.

I'm hoping that her mother is still inside. If she is not, I will have to walk away. Controlling the human mind is

my specialty, my gift, but it only works on one human at a time.

I reach the top of the hill, and there she is . . . beautiful Sarah. She's sucking softly on a melting chunk of ice. The sun edges her profile in orange, as she watches a squirrel hurriedly climb the fence. The outline of her face is dramatic against the brightness of the afternoon sky.

I concentrate on the back of her head, pushing psychic energy in her direction, filling her mind up with thoughts. Come to me. Walk to me, Sarah. Come this way.

She turns her head, and I am taken aback. I'm so close to her beauty that I can barely think. Her good looks are more intense from up close. She is breathtaking—an angel right here on earth! She looks into my eyes, waiting for me to speak.

Come to me, Sarah. Come this way.

She doesn't move. I try harder, feeling weak in the knees. Telepathic energy flows between us.

No, she says, without speaking out loud. You are bad. You are a bad, bad man.

I am shocked. This has never happened before! My mind control powers never fail!

I concentrate on her eyes, pushing outward with my thoughts, invading the soft tissue of her brain. Sarah, please come. I want to show you something. I want to draw you a sand castle, a picture.

She is resistant, and I am vibrating with so much energy that my knees begin to buckle and bend. I fall to the ground, never breaking our gaze. I will have her. She will listen, she will.

I am sweating. There is the strangest pain in my chest. Sarah's eyes look darker than before, like a midnight sky with no stars or moon to make light. There is a wind howling through my skull, an uninvited force, a tornado of psychic power in my brain. I hear a little girl's voice whisper 'No. I won't come. You are a bad, bad man.'

Sarah is invading my mind. Her energy is like tiny, prying fingers, opening the top of my skull. She funnels information through the invisible opening, reading my life's story like a child's picture book. There is power in her eyes, sheer psychic strength. Like nothing I've seen in all my years.

I want to avert my gaze, to break our stare, but something indescribable holds me there. I can't seem to look away no matter how hard I try. All expression has left her face now. Her eyes are as dark as the nighttime sea. As

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black as the ocean at night.

I can't breathe, and my lungs begin to hurt, short gasps of air escaping my mouth. My heart feels suddenly as if it were filled with broken glass. I have never felt a pain so severe. My blood cells are like minuscule razorblades, every pump of my heart pushing the pain to more and more parts of my body.

Sarah will not break our gaze.

I try to scream, but my throat is suddenly closed off. Something intangible is gripping my neck. I feel it squeezing, choking the life from my body. My hands frantically search for a culprit, for something solid and fleshy to fight. There is nothing to grab . . . only a tightness in my throat, blocking the air from my lungs.

My heart is beating slower now . . . too slow. The world is fading in and out, like someone's flicking a light switch. I can hardly feel the grass on my skin, barely feel the hot metal of the fence. I squeeze it with shaking fingers, and yet I feel nothing. A strange numbness consumes my whole body.

Sarah smiles. She's a devil in disguise.

Something long-forgotten creeps over my mind: a fear of death, as my vision slowly fades. Blackness falls like a curtain over the bright summer sky. I feel so mortal, so helpless and weak.

A distant voice is saying. "Who is that man? Dear god! He needs help!"

It's the voice of Sarah's mother . . . but it's too late for me. I feel it coming. I can finally feel death.

Bio:

L.B. Goddard's stories have been accepted to such magazines as: Sand—A Journal of Strange Tales, Twisted Tongue, Twisted Dreams, NexGen Pulp, and Yellow Mama Webzine. She is inspired by ghosts, goblins, and ghouls. L.B. resides in a suburb of St. Louis, MO. She runs an online horror fiction magazine at:

[www.themonstersnextdoor.webs.com](http://www.themonstersnextdoor.webs.com)





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# The Voice

by Jeff Woodward



HE BEGAN TO HEAR THE VOICES about a week ago. Mark was positive he set the monitor up correctly. After unpackaging it, he carefully read the instructions that were included in the box. He removed the plastic wrapping the baby monitor was encased in, unwound the wire tie from the power cord, installed the AA batteries, and set the frequency to channel two. He plugged it in the outlet, and called his wife into the child's room to wait while he went into the kitchen to install the batteries into the receiver that is the second part of the two-part monitor set. He set the receiver frequency to channel two, turned on the receiver, and called for his wife to begin talking into the monitor. A steady stream of profanity coursed through the receiver, some of it directed at certain body parts that Mark has had an issue with during the past few years. Mark switched off the receiver, and sat back on the kitchen chair.

"Ok, it works," Marked yelled. He forgot their one year old son, Jacob, was quietly sleeping in his portable crib in the living room, a few feet away. Hoping he hadn't awoken him, Mark switched off the monitor, and sat down on the couch, feeling weariness overcoming him, and gently closed his eyes. After what seemed like minutes, he was awoken by his wife, shaking his shoulder.

"What?" asked Mark, more agitated than curious.

"Shhh," whispered his wife. "Listen." Mark's wife held the baby receiver in her hands. Mark bent his head to the speaker, ear nearly brushing against it. The smell of ozone drifted into his nostrils, as he strained to hear the something his wife was talking about.

"I don't hear a godda . . ." Mark cut himself off in mid-sentence, as something barley audible resonated through the speaker. Mark pressed his ear against the receiver, and began to make out what sounded like gibberish at first, but slowly started to formulate into coherent words. Mark

felt the hairs on the nape of his neck began to stand. It was a female voice, which was clear. Older, as opposed to young or middle aged. A curious accent the voice had, either English or Irish, Mark could not tell.

"Be good, me boy," directed the voice. "I'll be looking after ye soon enough." Mark heard his son giggle, as the voice went on. "They thought ye passed last night, but no boy of mine will be walking in Hades without the proper rites. I must tend to the girls now, me boy. Sleep well with God." Mark's wife jumped up and ran to the door. As if blocked by some supernatural force, the door would not budge. Mark's wife screamed, kicking and banging the bedroom door, rage-filled tears streaming down her face. The natural instinct of the mother pushed the fear aside for the moment, the need to protect her offspring taking over her emotions. Then, as if directed at Mark himself, the female voice continued. "I'll not be having me boy living among ye. Keep ye're distance. He's mine, and always has been." The voice shifted pitch, becoming ever the more menacing. In a low, guttural, almost growling, it added, "He's mine. Mark me words. Death awaits those who cross me." The receiver then fell silent. Mark heard the door crash open, as his wife finally entered the room. The snoring of Jacob raised the primordial fear of the supernatural in Mark's blood. The child was fast asleep, as if in a dream. During the whole exchange, Mark sat transfixed on the receiver, as if mesmerized by the voice. Snapping out of his enchantment, Mark rushed into the child's room. His wife was holding their son, who looked at them with sleep-filled eyes, more in confusion than surprise.

"What the hell was that!" Mark's wife screamed at him.

"What the hell was that?" Mark didn't answer right away. He led his wife and son to the living room, and sat



them on the couch. His wife stared at him, fear still lingering in her eyes. With all the courage he could muster, he slowly began to speak:

"Martina, there are things that I should have told you when we were first married. Subjects that are considered macabre, or at the very least, strange to the common person. Subjects concerning my family, and this house that we are now living in." Mark paused for a second. Martina stared at him with frowning and suspicious eyes. He continued:

"As you are well aware of, this house belonged to my father, and his father's father before him. After settling here after their arrival from England, my great grandfather found employment with the building of the canal that now runs past here, down to the Gulf of Mexico. Like most immigrants at the time; the Irish, Poles and Russians, he was poor, and trying to make a better life for himself than he had had back in the old country. He eventually saved up enough to build this house, and added on to it over the years as his wealth began to accumulate. But he did have his vices, chiefly drinking and whoring about, and a horrible secret that he thought he escaped in England." Mark paused, as if trying for dramatic effect. His wife still stared at him, curiosity replaced the fear she felt just a few moments ago.

"You see, Martina, back in England, my great-grandfather left a secret, one so terrible and unbelievable that he had to leave. As the story went, he raped a woman in his former village; a drunken, stupid act of lust and forbidden desire. That union caused the birth of a son. But the violent union, and subsequent birth, could never be prosecuted, nor consecrated. See, the woman he raped was his own sister."

Martina's mouth dropped in horrid disbelief. The uncanny event that had just happened in their son's room was forgotten for the time being as Mark continued.

"To cover up his crime, my great-grandfather, in an unthinkable act that only the guilty could commit, strangled his sister in her room at the flat she was staying at in London's Lower East End. In his haste he did not even attempt to hide his crime; gathering infant son and such belongings he could carry in his personal traveling bag, he booked passage to America. At the time of his arrival at the Port of Boston, his crime would have had no time to reach the New Continent. He was just a widower traveling with infant son, one of millions of people to enter the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century."

"And what of the infant son?" Martina asked, her first words since Mark began the tale. "You have never mentioned a great uncle."

"As well as I should have had one, but to no avail. The unholy infant died a few months after my great-grandfather's arrival, to cholera, most likely spread by contaminated drinking water carried aboard the passenger ship he and my great grandfather were passengers of. This should have been the end of the tale, but for one peculiar instance that happened moments before my great grandfather's death."

Martina inched closer to the edge of the couch seat. The baby was still fast asleep in her arms, the supernatural incident of a scarce ten minutes beforehand long given away to the peaceful slumber that can be only realized by a child.

"Minutes before my great grandfather's death, my father received a call at his home from my great grandfather, who sounded very much in a frenzy and state of near panic. My father rushed to his old house, a mere block away. He tried to push the front door open, but it wouldn't budge. With a forcefully kick, he managed to bust in the door headlong, to the sight of my great grandfather lying on the living room floor. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught a flash white, moving too fast to be human in origin. He turned to look, but it was gone before he could catch a good glimpse. He saw only the white streaking by in preternatural haste, and a faint scent of ivy hung in the air. My father absorbed this in a flash, and knelt at my great grandfather's side. His breathing was rapid and erratic; it was obvious he was experiencing heart failure. With what strength he could muster, he pulled my father's ear to his lips, and told him the tale that I am now telling you. As he finished his horrid story, he added with his dying breath;

'She was seeking the child. What she had become is impossible under the eyes of God. Anne, damn you, my sister, my curse, my love. Your vengeance has been wrought, and now I die.' My father closed my great grandfather's eyes, and called for an ambulance. He only repeated this account once, that being on a stormy night when we were sitting around the warm embers of the hearth, drinking single malt scotch and discussing the various philosophical disciplines concerning the paranormal. That was the first, and only time he related this story."

Martina stared at Mark in total disbelief. The tale he told must have seemed too unearthly for a rational hu-



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man being to comprehend. She began slowly, as if just now ingesting all that had been unraveled to her.

"If what you are saying is truth; the scandalous union, the murder and kidnapping; the death of a child and the subsequent appearance of it's murdered mother to exact revenge; then it is obvious who that voice was on the monitor, and that she thinks . . ."

". . . Our son is her own, and she has come to claim him," Mark finished.

"And what do you plan to do now? I am not staying one more minute in this house with that . . . that thing haunting about, and neither is our son."

Mark remained quiet, as if in deep contemplation. Mark's wife studied his face, trying to read his thoughts. Mark began slowly:

"No matter where we go, where we live or move to, this entity will find us. It seems to have found us now, and I have no reason to doubt it would do so again. I can not have my family being haunted by this ghost, this unholy specter. It came without warning, and I have no doubt it will remain until it gets what it is after. We can call investigators in, those few who track and research and analyze such phantoms. I have no doubt this haunt will follow us until it gets what it wants, we must leave with the child, and quickly. Start gathering the necessities we'll need for a few days stay at a hotel. I'll go into the child's bedroom and pick up what he'll need."

Mark left his wife, as she started gathering their clothing, toiletries, and other necessities. As he entered the child's room, an eerie sense of being observed by inhuman eyes passed over his frame. He slowly approached the dresser, opened the top drawer, and began to remove some of his son's undergarments. His clammy skin began to bead with cold sweat, as he felt icy breath on the nape of his neck. With a flash he turned, and to his horror was staring directly into the gray, semi-translucent eyes of the ghost. Her face was gaunt; almost skeletal. Her mouth was slightly ajar, as if about to speak. Long, wavy white hair fell along the length of her shoulders, and a night robe of the same translucency flowed about her corpse-thin frame. Mark froze in his tracks, the primordial fear locking him into place. The thing reached out, grabbing him in it's death-like grip about his shoulders. He almost screamed in terror, and the thing's mouth opened as if to speak. Mark closed his eyes, praying to whatever gods still listened to those in death's grasp. Suddenly, he was released, and with a whoosh, the phantom

was gone, closing the bedroom door behind it. "No!" screamed Mark, more out of rage at being fooled by the wraith than fear. He ran to the door, only to find it barred to his struggles. No matter how much he shoved against it with his medium sized frame, the door would not budge. Mark began to yell, "Martina, Martina, get out of the house!" Mark pressed his ear against the door, and was thrown into utter disarray at what he heard. The muffled cries of his wife, his son, and then a third, manlike voice. The male voice was yelling, shouting it seemed, much louder than the screams of his family. Mark struggled harder against the door, pushing against it until the blood pushed hard into his temples. All at once, the voices stopped, and Mark went sprawling into the hallway as the door flew open. Gathering himself from the floor, mark rushed into his bedroom, to find his wife laying on the floor, evidently unconscious. His son was still in her arms, though he was awake, silent yet looking wildly around in confusion at the utter havoc that must have just transpired. Mark raced to his wife's side, and knelt at her shoulders. She still breathed; she was still alive. Mark gently picked the child up, and laid him upon the bed. He then scooped up his wife, and laid her beside the child. He went into the bathroom, and soaked a washcloth with lukewarm water. He returned to his wife, and gently began to wipe her forehead with the cloth. Moments later she awoke, and almost with a start, she jumped up. When she realized it was Mark at her side, she broke down and cried. Mark waited, not wanting to bombard her with questions in her present frame of mind. After a few more moments, she began to speak;

"The ghost flew into the room. I screamed, and she reached out with the thin wiry hands of hers, and tried to grab the baby from my arms. I held tight, praying to every god I have ever heard of to grant me the strength to hold tight, not letting her take him away. And held tight I did, though that specter was wearing down my strength, and I could feel my power ebbing as we continued to struggle. Then, when I thought all was lost, and I screamed in frustration at the gods for not granting me the strength of a man, another ghostlike apparition appeared, though this time, it was that of a man." She stopped for a second, as if in recollection, then continued.

"The male apparition was dressed in an elegant, eighteen hundred's style suit. His hair was of solid white,

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and was his mustache. He took only a fleeting interest in our presence, focusing himself firmly on the female ghost that plagued us so. The man shoved her to the side, causing her to lose her grip on the baby. As she glared at the new being, a look of recognition flashed from her gray eyes. The man then rushed her, grabbing her by the wrists and shouted, 'You do not belong here, and the child is not yours! I thought I killed you dead, and you will join me in the netherworld, this is promise you!' The female ghost's face looked at him in horror, or what could be construed as horror to a wraith. And with a flash of bluish-green light, both were gone."

Mark stared at his wife, both with pity at what she had to endure, and with admiration at her maternal inner strength. Without saying a word, he held her head lightly to his chest, and both began a soft slumber, with their son in between them, the day's happenings still fresh on their minds, but too exhausted to deal with them at the moment.





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# The Dead Horse Saloon

by Emmanuel Paige



DEVIN PRUITT STEPPED ON the accelerator and pushed the white 1965 Camaro down the highway like a supersonic jet taking off from the runway, the Day-Glo orange needle on the speedometer quickly moving past the 100 miles per hour mark. The radio blasted out White Zombie through high-wattage speakers. Tony Clark, his only passenger, was holding onto the dash, his face pale with fear as he watched the scenery whisk by in a blur.

"Slow down," Tony shouted over the music.

He turned the music down.

Devin cackled insanely and shouted: "Hee-fucking-haw! Hold on tight. We're making good time."

Tony rolled his eyes, sighed in defeat, and genuflected. "Lord have mercy on my wretched soul," he said.

"Give me another beer," Devin said.

"Slow down first," Tony said.

"Okay-dokey," Devin said, hitting the brakes hard.

Tony was thrown up against the dash where he braced himself, wondering why he put himself through this punishment. "Man, I swear you can be such an asshole sometimes," he said.

"You're a pussy, Tony," Devin said. "Relax. I've got it under control. Give me a beer."

Tony reached behind his seat and produced a bottle of beer. "Here you go, Captain," he said. He pulled one out for himself and twisted the cap. "I need another one after that. Man, your driving scares the shit out of me sometimes."

"Oh, quit your bitching," Devin said, opening his beer. He took a long drink, burped, then wiped his mouth on his sleeve. "This baby here"—he patted the dashboard with his hand—"holds to the road like a champ. I can let go of the wheel and she'll drive all by herself." He let go of the wheel to prove his point.

"Goddammit Devin!" Tony shouted. "Quit that shit. Man, your out of your fucking mind. You're going to end up killing somebody one of these days. And to tell you the truth . . . I don't really want to die."

"You sound just like a woman," Devin said, gripping the wheel with one hand. "I've got it under control."

The headlights pierced the pitch black night with cones of bright halogen light. A blue road-sign with white sans serif letters zipped by proclaiming that they had just reached the Cottonwood Creek city limits; another sign whisked by saying that there was a speed zone ahead. The radar detector mounted on the dash made a series of blips and bleeps—in audible over the music—and green and red lights blinked and flashed, warning that a police cruiser with radar was somewhere nearby. Devin slowed the car down and it seemed like they were crawling after the previously high speeds. The music still boomed from the speakers. Devin finished his beer, rolled down the window, tossed the empty bottle out.

Up ahead, on the side of the road, a hitchhiker was standing with his arm out and his thumb pointing skyward. He was wearing a blue denim jacket and pants, and black engineer boots.

Devin slammed on the brakes and brought the car to a screeching halt.

The hitchhiker trotted up to the car and peeked through the window.

Tony opened the door and said: "Where you heading?"

"I'm going home," he said. His breath came out like puffy clouds in the brisk night air. "I've been standing out here forever. Nobody will stop. Man I need a car like this. Nice ride."

"Get in," Devin said.

The hitchhiker climbed into the back seat.



"Hey, thanks for stopping," the hitchhiker said. "Man, its cold out there."

"No problem," Devin said. He stepped on the throttle and started the car rolling down the road. "Hey, you want a beer? Get him beer, Tony."

Tony got him a beer.

"You want to go to a party?" Devin asked.

"Hell yeah," the hitchhiker said, opening his beer.

"Good, cause we're out to rock-and-fucking-roll to-night. Can you dig it?"

"I can dig it," the hitchhiker said.

"There's a bar out here that has go-go dancers—"

"Exotic dancers," Tony interrupted. "They're called exotic dancers."

"Yeah. Whatever," Devin said. "Anyway, It's called The Dead Horse Saloon. I drove by it the other day, but I didn't stop in. It looked like it was closed. I figured I'd wait till a Friday night to check it out. Looks like a pretty cool place."

"I know the place," the hitchhiker said.

"I've never been there before," Devin said. "But I was passing by and I seen the sign that said something about gentleman's club and dancing girls. So, I figured it might be worth checking out."

"Let's do it," the hitchhiker replied.

"Cool," Devin said. "We're almost there."

Devin took a joint from his ear and pushed in the cigarette lighter on the dash. It popped out and he stuck the glowing lighter up to the joint and lit it. He inhaled deeply and then handed it back to the hitchhiker.

"Right on, man," the hitchhiker said. "I can dig it."

Abruptly, a car came around the corner up ahead, straight toward them, the headlights surprising Devin and blinding him. He wasn't paying attention and, traveling at well over 80 miles an hour, he hit the brakes, swerved and careened out of control. The Camaro went into the opposite lane, heading straight toward the oncoming vehicle. Devin could see the shocked look in the woman's eyes as she tried to veer out of the way, and the two children who were staring wide-eyed and shocked, pale white with fear. A horn blared, tires squealed and screamed, and then the two cars collided suddenly, the impact tearing metal and shattering glass. The world spun around, uncontrollably, the smell of gas and burning rubber filled the air as the Camaro slid off of the road and down into the ditch. It slammed violently into a tree. The other car, a station wagon, shot off the road

and down a steep embankment, smashing on the rocks some hundred feet down at the bottom, where it burst into flames.

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Devin opened his eyes and looked around at the dark interior of the wrecked car. It took him a moment to realize what had happened and when he did it hit him with all of the force of an atom bomb. His neck hurt, but he didn't think it was broken, so, straining, he lifted himself up and checked on his passengers.

"Tony . . ." he said, rolling over and looking around. "You okay?"

He reached over and shook Tony, who was out cold and looked like he was dead. There was a large gash on his face and blood bubbling from his lips. His breathing was labored and his chest heaved. Devin looked in the backseat, but the hitchhiker was gone.

"Hey, buddy," he said, gently shaking Tony. "Wake up. You're not dead. Come on, man, wake up. Everything is going to be alright."

Tony wasn't dead, but he was very close to it. The blood bubbling from his mouth was proof of that.

"Shit. Oh fuck," Devin said. "Come on Tony, wake up. Oh, fuck me."

Devin pried the door open and crawled out onto the wet grassy hill. He staggered and fell, climbing up the grassy embankment. He mounted the summit of the hill and stepped onto the road and looked around.

"Sonuvabitch," he said. "Oh God, why?"

He staggered to the other side of the road and looked down at the smoking wreckage of the station wagon. The world began to spin, his knees grew weak and his stomach heaved. He vomited violently.

After he caught his breath, he looked around to see if there was anyone who could possibly offer some assistance. The road was deserted from both ways. The night was quiet and cold and filled with the smell of motor oil and burning rubber. He reached in his pocket and took out his cell phone. He turned it on only to read: No Service.

"Shit," he said, throwing the phone into the bushes. He started walking, limping from a sharp stabbing pain in his leg, down the road toward a group of street lights that seemed to be a couple of miles away. He would get help there. He hurried down the deserted highway.



After walking for what seemed like eternity, Devin could see a parking lot up ahead bathed in amber light from an overhead sodium-vapor lamp. There were several cars in the parking lot, including a Harley Davidson motorcycle. He could read the sign now. It said: THE DEAD DOG SALOON AND GENTLEMEN'S CLUB, FINE FOOD AND SPIRITS, EXOTIC DANCERS, KARAOKE ON THURSDAYS AT 9:00 PM.

He picked up his pace and stepped off of the pavement onto the gravel parking lot. He could hear loud music coming from inside of the building. When he opened the door he saw a pretty girl suspended upside down from a brass pole, wearing nothing but a pair of black patent leather high heel shoes. A song by Nirvana was blasting through the speakers. He could smell cheap perfume, stale cigarette smoke and beer. The lights were dim and thousands of squares of light peppered the room like glitter from a swirling mirrored ball that hung suspended from the ceiling, spinning and glimmering brilliantly. Black lights cast a purple glow around the room, making everything that was white or fluorescent shine brightly.

Devin looked around the bar in a quick glance. There was an old man in a black biker Captain's hat sitting at the bar next to a skinny woman with died red hair and too much make-up, smoking a Salem cigarette and drinking red wine. A fat man in a tank top t-shirt sat next to her. A man who looked like an escaped convict sat next to him. Two women were in a booth kissing in a passionate embrace. Across the room, by the stage where the naked girl was dancing, an old man was holding a twenty dollar bill in his mouth, getting as close to her as he could. She teased him with a gyration of her hips. There was a group of young guys, college kids, cutting up and whistling at the girl and the old man. There was a Gothic couple, all dressed in black, spikes and piercings, sitting at a table on the other side of the stage. There was a black guy that looked like a pimp sitting far back in a dark corner.

A big bald headed man with a glistening diamond earring stepped up to Devin and said: "You got some ID, buddy?"

"I just need to use the phone," Devin said. "It's an emergency. There's been an accident. Hurry."

The man shook his head and pointed toward the bartender. "You'll have to talk to him," he said.

The music stopped and the naked girl picked up her cloths and money from the stage. She disappeared quick-

ly through a back door. The DJ spoke over the PA system in a loud announcer's voice.

"ALRIGHT," the DJ said. "EVERYBODY GIVE IT UP FOR HOLLY."

The crowd applauded.

"AND NOW, GET READY FOR BOBBY BLUE."

The crowd applauded even louder.

Another girl came out and started to dance. She was wearing a fancy costume with leather and lace and boots all the way up to her ass, everything she wore was colored blue, including her lipstick and hair. AC/DC blasted through the speakers.

"What'll you have," the bartender asked Devin.

"Huh? What?" Devin said. "I need to use the phone. I just got in a car accident up the road. I need an ambulance. There's people hurt out there. Where's your phone?"

"Ain't got no phone," the bartender said. "We had it removed because there was too much drug activity. If you know what I mean."

"Fuck man," Devin said. "Didn't you hear me. There's been an accident. Get some help."

"Okay," the bartender said. "Just hold your horses."

He turned and went back to tending the bar. He dried some glasses and then served more drinks.

"What the fuck?" Devin said. He couldn't believe this. He was in an emergency situation and nobody was listening to him. He had to do something. He shouted at the top of his lungs: "There's been an accident down the road. People are dead. I need some help."

Nobody responded.

"Aren't you listening to me?" Devin shouted. "Are you people fucking nuts? I NEED SOME FUCKING HELP!"

The bartender came back over and spoke to Devin: "Listen . . . you need to calm down. You're upsetting some of the customers."

"What?" Devin said, flabbergasted.

"Now sit down and have a drink," the bartender said.

"In-fucking-credible," Devin said. "Didn't you hear what I said. There's people hurt down the road."

"Yeah, I heard you," the bartender said. "Now . . . did you hear me?"

Devin felt his temper flaring. This couldn't be happening. This had to be a dream. Frantically, he looked around for something, anything, anyone to help with this situation. He was getting hysterical. He ran toward

the stage, turned toward the DJ station and grabbed the microphone. The DJ didn't try to stop him.

"LISTEN," Devin screamed into the microphone. "EVERYBODY LISTEN. THERE HAS BEEN AN ACCIDENT AND PEOPLE ARE HURT—MAYBE DEAD. PEOPLE MIGHT BE DEAD. I NEED SOME FUCKING HELP. WHO CAN HELP ME?"

The music stopped and the girl, Bobby Blue, stopped dancing. The room was silent for a moment and then everyone began to boo and hiss and throw bottles, ashtrays and other items at Devin. The DJ snatched the microphone back from Devin.

"ALL RIGHT," the DJ said loudly in his monotonous radio announcers voice. "HOW ABOUT THAT? EVERYBODY GIVE IT UP FOR BOBBY BLUE."

The crowd cheered.

Devin looked at the DJ in disbelief and said: "What the fuck? Are you people insane?"

"Go sit down," the DJ said into the microphone. "Nobody wants to hear about your problems."

The crowd cheered again, louder.

Devin was speechless. He looked around, dumbfounded. "What a bunch of cold hearted motherfuckers," he said. He turned and ran toward the door. Devin hit the door and bounced backward, falling to the ground. The door was locked.

"WE GOT A LIVE ONE, FOLKS," the DJ said over the music. "YOU'LL ONLY FIND THIS KIND OF FUN AT THE DEAD HORSE SALOON . . ."

Devin sat on the floor, his head spinning as he looked around the room. This was a nightmare; it had to be.

The bartender picked him up from the floor and led him to a stool at the bar. Devin resisted at first, but the big burley bouncer at the door assisted the bartender and sat him down on a stool. Devin was looking around in disbelief as the bartender put a bottle of beer on the bar and said: "Relax. Everything is going to be alright. Don't worry about it. There ain't nothing you can do now."

"ALRIGHT," the DJ said in his canned voice. "LET'S GET BACK TO THE FESTIVITIES."

Courtney Love filled the air through the speakers, with her band Hole, singing about doll parts. Another pretty girl came out onto the stage and began dancing, taking off her cloths. The patrons went back to business as usual.

The DJ said: "EVERYBODY GIVE IT UP FOR SARAH."

Devin didn't know what to do. He watched the girl dancing. It was like an LSD trip. This had to be an acid flashback. What was happening, he wondered. Suddenly he saw his whole life flash before his eyes. Images of people and places that he loved filled his mind. He thought about the people involved in the accident. The lady and her children. The hitchhiker. Tony. They were probably all dead. He shook his head as a tear rolled down his cheek. "What have I done?" he said to no one in particular. "Oh, God, what have I done?"

"He can't help you now," a voice said, bringing Devin out of his stupor.

"Huh? What?" Devin said. He looked at the man sitting next to him at the bar. It was the guy that looked like an escaped convict.

"What did you say?" Devin said.

"It's too late for that," the man said.

"Too late for what?"

"Help from God," the man said. "He can't help you now."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Devin said. He absentmindedly picked up the bottle of beer sitting in front of him and took a drink. It tasted strange. It had no taste at all, like water.

"Look," the man said, pointing toward the window by the door. "Look out there."

Devin swiveled around on his bar stool and looked through the window. He could see out into the parking lot. He stood up from his stool and walked slowly to the window. He rubbed his eyes.

Outside, in the parking lot, under the sodium-vapor lamps, there was a group of people standing solemnly, looking back toward the bar. They were looking directly at Devin. He could see Tony, and the woman with her two children. They were covered in blood and bile, pieces of their bodies missing, gashes and lacerations covering their faces, flaps of skin and hair hanging askew.

"What the . . .?" Devin said, putting his hand against the cold glass. "It can't be. What are they doing out there?"

Suddenly he saw Tony begin to glow bright white, and then the woman and children all started to glow as if they were illuminated by floodlights, millions of fireflies swarming around them. They became translucent and a vaporous green color, like swamp gas, and their forms began to melt and merge, wavering, waxing and waning, like a candle flame in a gentle breeze. They swirled around,

faster and faster, merging, becoming one and turning into a fantastic green glowing tornado, rising into the sky. Leaves and debris swirled around in the wake of the twister. It reached high into the night sky, illuminating the clouds. There was a loud sound, like hurricane force winds, emanating from the cyclone. The clouds roiled and rumbled, lightning bolts licking the gaseous twister, snapping and crackling with electric intensity. A horrendous thunderclap shook the glass under Devin's hand, and then a bright light filled the sky like an exploding atomic bomb, blinding him for a moment. He put up his arms to block the bright light, and closed his eyes.

"Holy shit," Devin said.

When he opened his eyes, the parking lot was empty except for the swirling cyclone of debris that was slowly settling back to the ground. It was dark again, and the glow of the sodium-vapor lamp seemed sinister now, like the glow from a jack-o'-lantern. It was silent in the room behind him. He stood motionless, staring out into the parking lot, afraid to turn around. What the hell is happening, he thought. Why is it so quiet in here? He could feel all of the eyes on him, everybody in the room was watching. He felt tiny fingers tickling his spine.

The DJ broke the silence, saying: "HEY-HEY. NOW THAT WAS QUITE A LIGHT SHOW, WASN'T FOLKS?"

Devin still didn't turn around. He was looking out into the parking lot where the cyclone had been.

"WHAT'S SAY WE GET BACK TO BUSINESS," the DJ continued in his announcers voice. "EVERYBODY GIVE IT UP FOR JESSICA FOX."

The crowd applauded. Music blasted through the speakers. It was Rob Zombie singing about a living dead girl.

"Did you guys see that?" Devin asked, turning around.

When he turned around and looked at the others in the room, he was filled with an absolute horror of terrifying proportions. The patrons of the bar had changed. They were all wrinkled and withered and crawling with maggots. The girl dancing on the stage had long snow-white hair, black fingernails, no lips, and one eyeball. She did a spin and then did the splits. Her jaw fell to the floor and she quickly reached down and picked it up and put it back on. The guy that looked like an escaped convict had changed into a sinister looking creature, serpentine, with horns, and claws. He looked at Devin and laughed.

Devin might have fainted, right then, but he managed to stagger to the bar.

"Welcome to the club," the man said. "You are our newest member."

"What?" Devin said. "I don't want to be a member. I just want to go home. This has to be a dream. It has to be."

"Sorry, son," the bartender said. "But this is your home now. This is the real deal. Nobody ever leaves."

Devin looked up and saw the bartender all festering flesh and maggots. A beetle was crawling around in an empty eye socket.

"Take a look for yourself," the bartender said. He pointed to the mirror behind the bar—the one they always put there so you can see just how drunk you are getting.

Devin looked and was struck with overwhelming dread when he saw his reflection. He was a grizzly ball of meat, eyeball hanging down the side of his face, lips split down the middle, a gash on his forehead that made him look like he had been hit with a hatchet. He was covered in a bloody stew of guts, ropes and coils of intestines hanging out of his punctured abdomen.

"No," he said. "That's not me. No, fucking way."

He turned and ran to the door, grabbed the handle and yanked hard. His bloody hands slipped from the brass knob. The door was locked and wouldn't budge. He pulled the doorknob with all of his might, pushing and kicking, beating his fists against it and sobbing until he was out of energy and slid to the floor, his face flat against the smooth and cool metal.

"I just want to go home," he said. "Just want to go home."

After a while he realized that he wasn't going anywhere any time soon so he got up from the floor and went and took his seat at the bar. The situation was too much for him to bear. He turned to look at the guy sitting next to him and was shocked to see the hitchhiker. There was a dancer hanging from his shoulder, licking his ear with a black tongue. He was grinning a big cheese-eating grin.

"You we're right," he said, wiping a drop of blood from his lips with the back of his hand. "This place is great."







*Photo by Brett Koppen*

# LadyParasyte

## The Macabre Cadaver

### Premier Edition Interview

Interview by Jeff Woodward

Biography by Brett Koppen

**L**ADYPARASYTE WAS BORN in Kankakee, Illinois. At a very young age she moved to the city of Chicago where she spent most of her educational years at various Catholic Schools, often being labeled the “weird girl” due to her array of hair colors, eccentric makeup, spiky knee-high boots and fishnets augmenting her Catholic schoolgirl skirt. She then grew up, as most humans do, and went on to study Live Sound Reinforcement at the Music Industry Workshop which inspired her to pursue her own musical endeavors.

LP, along with production from fellow Chicago musician Jim “birdFEEDER” Vanaria of the band Essenza, has established a sound incorporating elements of industrial, electro and metal music creating a fusion of sound that ranges from strikingly aggressive to addictingly catchy. Her lyrical content often goes beyond the “black and white” often dealing with the “shades of gray.” Already gaining an impressive online following, LP is making the Chicago music scene take notice with a unique voice: repentant and apologetic one moment, then relentless and unforgiving the next.

LP was a featured guest on the Chicago “industrial/electronic” outfit Die Warzau’s latest album, *Supergangbang*. She has also been credited for getting the metal band Scum of the Earth signed with Eclipse records. Her single *Salvage* is featured on the promotional compilation release for Ominous Passions Clothing as well as Creative Violence Records “More Than One Way to Skin a Corpse.” It will also appear on her debut album, *Abandoned Places*, currently in production. Most recently, she contributed lyrics and vocals to the track *Shinjuku Vampire Club* featured on Alan Oldhams release *The Art of Transformation 2*. In her spare time she enjoys practicing making “air quotes” with her hands and has been studying the *Zombie Survival Guide*. She now lives in Chicago with her cats Oz and Staley, and is clearly outside Joss Whedon’s court mandated 25-mile restraining order radius.

***How long have you been creating music?***

As far as recording I think I really began pursuing it probably about 2005, when I began recording with birdFEEDER (Jim Vanaria). He’s a big fan of EBM/Industrial and we would just come up with complete songs in one night. For as long as I can remember though I would always be writing lyrics. I have notebooks filled with lyrics. Some good and some that I think should probably remain only in those notebooks.

***Who are some of your influences?***

One of my biggest musical inspirations is a woman named Stella Katsoudas who formed the band Sister Soleil. She released two amazing albums *Drown Me In You* and *Soularium*. Right now she sings for Dirty Little Rabbits. I’m also a big fan of Garbage, 12 Rounds, Massive Attack, My Ruin, Otep and Portishead.

Now, as far as non music inspirations I would have to say almost anything by Joss Whedon. He really knows how to write in a way people can relate to but places them in such fantastical circumstances. I’ve always wanted to be able to write in that way.

Beyond those, horror movies. I’m a horror movie junkie.

***Your songs range from the ethereal (“Salvage”), to fast and heavy electronic melodies (“Are You Dead Yet?”). Do your emotions at the time of creating, decide the tempo and lyrics of a song?***

Pretty much. When I put pen to paper, or more accurately finger to keyboard, I may hear the vocals one way but when it’s time to sing in front of the mic they can





come out a completely different way. I think originally "Salvage" sounded a lot harsher and more sarcastic in my head then it came out actually. For example the "every time you disappear, I keep wanting more" was intended to be EXTREMELY sarcastic but in the end I think it ended coming out very sincere sounding. It's fine with me if people want to interpret it either way.

With "Are You Dead Yet," that song was the product of an awful 3 year relationship and 8 bottles of Guinness.

***Is there a large electronic/industrial scene in Chicago?***

I think Chicago has a pretty good scene. With clubs like Neo and The Exit industrial music has a steady place in Chicago. It's definitely better than alot of other places in regards to bands trying to get their music heard. Mostly in the club scene though. Radio . . . well mainstream radio pretty much sucks here as I'm told it does everywhere else.

***If there was one artist you would compare yourself to, who would it be?***

Wow, only one! I guess, and I hope I'm worthy of saying this, is Tairrie B of My Ruin. Mainly because of the more growly stuff I do. I don't do that with every song but when I do I get a lot of Tairrie B. comparisons. I hope people aren't blowing wind up my skirt with that one because that is such a HUGE compliment to be compared to her. However, she did tell me once that I had "quite a set of lungs."

***Are you signed to a label?***

No, not at the moment. I'm currently working on an EP with Alan Oldham, (DJ-T1000). That will most likely be released on his label. Once my record is complete I will shop it around and then based on the results of that either sign with someone or self release it. Right now I have almost all my music available for digital download.

***What is in your CD player at the moment?***

Right now it is Curve, Come Clean. They are fantastic! I only wish I knew about them while they were still making music.

***What's your favorite club in Chicago to perform at?***

Well mostly I've been spending my time recording and am just working on getting a solid live lineup together. Clubs that I'd love to play are Abby Pub, Subterranean and Double Door. When I just want a beer, Club Foot is the way to go!



Visit LadyParasyte on the web at:

**[www.ladyparasyte.com](http://www.ladyparasyte.com)**

You can also find her on MySpace at:

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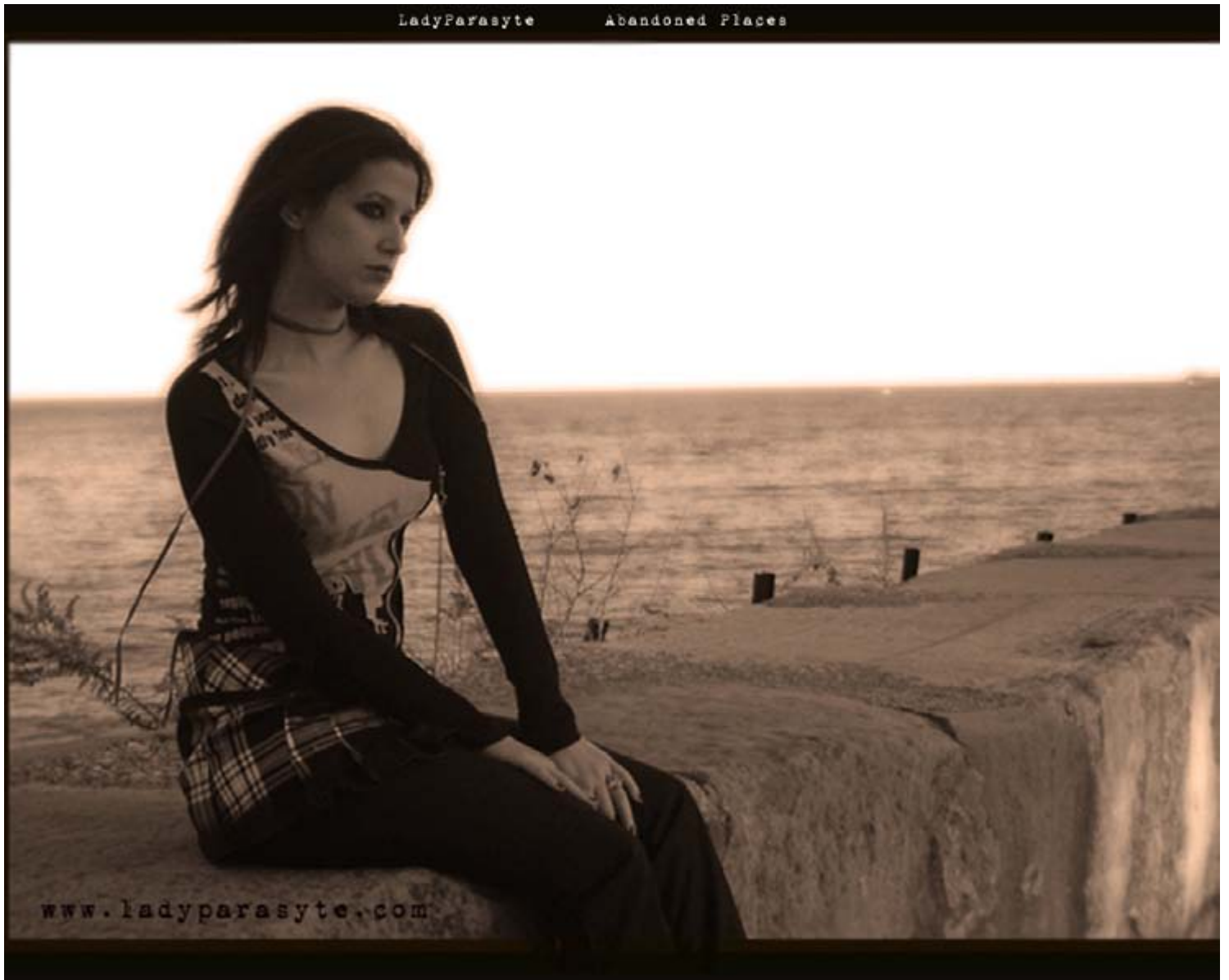
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# The Stepp Cemetery

## A Dying Legend

Article and Photos by Emmanuel Paige

THE STEPP CEMETERY, located in the Morgan-Monroe State Forest just north of Bloomington, and south of Martinsville, Indiana is home to a famous legend about the grave of a baby named Lester, and his protective mother's ghost: the "Lady in Black." She is rumored to wear the black dress of a lady in mourning, her hair is long and white, and she is said to haunt her dead baby's grave, lamenting and mourning her loss as she sits watching from her perch on the "warlock seat" (a stump in the shape of a chair). She is vigilant and protective, and she is said to chase unsuspecting visitors away when they get near her baby's grave. The baby, Lester, died as an infant in 1937, and the true cause of death was unknown only until recently. The variations of the legend told of many differing and fantastic ways that both the mother and the baby met their demise.

The history and the legend of the Stepp Cemetery are steeped in folklore and myth and it has so infiltrated the mythology of the local residents in the surrounding counties that the cemetery has become quite famous locally and abroad. Due to the cemetery lore, it has become a haunt for teenagers and college students alike to go out and drink beer and scare each other senseless as a right of passage. The cemetery attracts people from far away, too, as it has been highly publicised by the media and Internet. The local Indiana newspapers, including the Indianapolis Star, The Herald-Times, and The Martinsville Reporter-Times, have all published numerous articles about the Stepp Cemetery. There are numerous websites on the Internet that have the Stepp Cemetery as the core subject matter, from organizations, ghost hunting societies, to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) where you can find videos of the famous cemetery. A preliminary search for the keywords: "Stepp Cemetery" will bring up literally dozens of links that can be visited for more information. There are also

many books published that cover the legend of the Stepp Cemetery, including: "Campus Legends: A Handbook" by Elizabeth Tuckerbu, and "Haunted America" by Michael Norman and Beth Scott, and "Indiana Folklore: A Reader" by Linda Degh, among others, but the definitive source is from: "The Legend of Stepp Cemetery" by William H. Clements, and William E. Lightfoot, published in Indiana Folklore 5 (1971): pp. 92-141. Although the cemetery is enjoying a surge of popularity, with all of the traffic and exposure comes dire consequences: the cemetery is being destroyed by vandalism and litterbugs, and the legend is slowly dying.

I recall my first visit to the Stepp Cemetery. It was back around the summer of 2002 and I had never heard of the place before. Some friends and I were looking for some entertainment one night and someone suggested that we go out to the Stepp Cemetery and visit the "Black Lady's" grave. I recall thinking that they were calling her a "Black Widow" or something or other, and it all sounded like a big sham to me. I wasn't afraid of any ghost, and besides that, I liked the idea of going to a spooky place. I got a thrill out of that sort of thing, after all, I was an avid Stephen King fan, and that meant that it was my duty to sniff out this ghost.

We set off for the Morgan-Monroe State Forrest well after dark. The drive led down an old section of Highway 37 and into some rather secluded woods. When we arrived at the cemetery gate it was well into the evening, perhaps after midnight, and it was dark so we needed a flashlight in order to navigate the trail through the woods.

When we got to the perimeter of the cemetery there was a large limestone marker baring the inscription: STEPP CEMETERY, ESTABLISHED EARLY 1800's. I started to get a little uneasy when I saw that. The next

remarkable thing was a gravestone marker that said: Richard Samuel Westfall, Apr. 22, 1924, Aug. 24, 1996, Never at Rest. The words were instantly etched upon my mind: "Never at Rest." I thought that was a rather peculiar thing to have on a tombstone in a supposedly haunted cemetery. I felt my skin crawl. That is when I realized that something wasn't right about this place. I could feel an energy in the air, and because I was seeing the cemetery through the dark with a flashlight I was really getting some good atmosphere and visuals. It was like the air was filled with tiny motes of dust and electricity and you could literally breathe in the ghostly essence of the place. I was amazed at the antiquity and history of the place. There were a bunch of civil war veterans buried there and their markers were ancient and in an advanced state of decay. Some of the grave markers were so old that they had been stripped of any identifying markings. It was truly an eerie place to be.

The real scary part was yet to come. When we reached the legendary stump I was told of the story of the "Lady in Black" and her baby "Lester." I didn't really get it at the time, but I remember thinking that the stump was just a stump and not very spectacular, and that the baby's gravestone was constructed with rough concrete and plastic letters. It looked like a pauper's grave, and I couldn't figure out why someone would use crusty old concrete for a grave marker. I found out the rest of the story later on after living in Indiana for several more years and revisiting the Stepp Cemetery on numerous occasions.

There are several versions of the story about the Stepp Cemetery, and most of them adhere to the tried and true cautionary "Tale of the Hook." Most children are probably familiar with this kind of cautionary tale by the time they are in grade school. It goes something like this: An escaped lunatic who has a hook for a hand likes to lurk around where teenagers are out doing "bad" and "nasty" things that they shouldn't be doing. There is an announcement on the radio that the crazed lunatic known as "The Hook" has escaped from the insane asylum. He is on the loose. Lovers beware. The story develops and eventually the lunatic either tears the naughty lovers to pieces with his hook, or they narrowly escape with their lives and the hook is left as a bloody souvenir, severed off by the angry jilted boyfriend as it is caught on the door handle as he speeds away. The clincher being the hook hanging from the door handle and the boyfriend passing out white-faced and cold when he sees it as he is going to open the

car door for his girlfriend. The other rendition I loved as a kid was that the boyfriend left the girlfriend alone to go for help and she fell asleep and when the cops wake her up they tell her not to look up when she gets out of the car but she does and there is her boyfriend hanging dead in the tree.

Stepp Cemetery Marker - After Vandalism  
Beer Bottle - Left Behind by Vandals or Partygoers  
Stepp Cemetery Entry Wall - Graffiti  
Stepp Cemetery - Warlock Seat - Pencil Sketch by Emmanuel Paige

The legend of Stepp Cemetery shares many similar qualities with the "Tale of the Hook." There are several variations, but they all have the same thing in common: to scare the daylights out of anyone who dares to go near the cemetery. Part of the legend is that of the "warlock seat" (the chair shaped stump) and that it has the magical power to heal itself if damaged, or kill anyone who sits in it. I have recreated the "warlock seat" as it appeared in the 1970s in a drawing based on rare and hard to find photographs which could not be reprinted due to copyright restrictions. The artistic rendition shows the shape and texture of the chair; the shaping and construction was done with a chainsaw. The stump appears to be from a tree that had a trunk that split in a V and was cut down and shaped into the likeness of a chair.

Legend tripping and vandalism . . .

Thrill seekers go to the Stepp Cemetery just for fun; paranormal investigators and amateur ghost hunters go there in search of ghosts; college students studying folklore from Indiana University go there on field trips with their teachers; collectors of gravestone rubbings go there to collect rubbings; myth busters go there to prove it a hoax; pranksters go there to frighten the unwary visitors. It is an interesting place that is fun to visit and most people who go there are reverent and respectful, but it also attracts a deviant type of visitor too.

The major problem is vandalism. Some people don't seem to care that the place is a cemetery, a resting place for the dead, and they treat it like a freak show. If this were a regular cemetery located in a suburban area would the same thing happen? Although vandalism occurs throughout cemeteries all around the world, these "special" places that grow to mythical proportions seem to attract the worst of the worst when it comes to carelessness and vandalism. It is as if the popularity is going to be the demise of Stepp Cemetery, and many other places abroad that have spooky reputations.







Vandals have defaced the stone that greets visitors at the entryway to the cemetery. Since I took my photos a few years ago, the stone has suffered damage as if someone struck it with a hammer or other blunt object with enough force to make large chips in the limestone. I even imagine that some deviant may have shot at it with a gun, which enhances the danger factor immensely when you consider that this type of person might cross paths the more common benign sort of visitor to the Stepp Cemetery.

Why do people feel inclined to damage, destroy, and vandalize these places? Is it fear? Is it retaliation? Is it ignorance and disrespect?

The local people that live near such haunted places tend to agree that getting rid of the attraction altogether would be the best solution, after all, it attracts a certain undesirable element to their community and, an especially troublesome bunch known as criminal trespassers. These are the worst. They will trample onto private property in an instant to seek whatever haunt or ghost or rumor they have heard about. Fortunately, the Stepp Cemetery is on public or state property that is accessible to the community and you don't have to trespass to visit it; and the local authorities haven't figured out a way to keep meddlesome curiosity seekers out . . . yet. There is an 11:00 PM closing time, however, after which you could get into some trouble if you are caught messing around in the cemetery.

I recently went back to the Stepp Cemetery to look around and get some fresh images for this article. When I got there I was anxious to start taking pictures, and there was a car parked in front of the gate and a young couple was sitting on the wall and they seemed to be enjoying a pleasant afternoon picnic. I wanted to get a new picture of the gate during this beautiful time of year in Indiana, but I wasn't sure if they would like having their image publicized, and not wanting to interrupt their meal or wrangle with the legal aspects of taking someone's image and using it for publication, with or without permission, decided to wait. I thought, what the heck, I've already got a picture of the gate from a few years ago, the gate still looks the same, and what I really came here for was to get some pictures of the actual Stepp Cemetery. So, I said "hello" and me and my fiancée, Angela, commenced our hike down the trail and left them to enjoy their afternoon snack in peace.

The trees are really lush and green this time of the year

and it was beautiful, even though there was a vicious swarm of mosquitoes that seemed immune to the insect repellent we had brought with us. The trip down the trail was surreal and I began to get a familiar feeling that I get whenever I go out there, the feeling that I'm traveling back in time to a little microcosm where time stands still and the dead eternally slumber.

I began taking pictures on the way and when we got to the stone marker at the beginning of the cemetery the first thing Angela noticed was a bunch of candles surrounding the stone. I was on a mission to get some photos so I took a bunch of pictures noting all of the damage and trash that was strewn about the cemetery. The candles were a sign that someone had been up to some weird stuff out there in the cemetery (later, on the way out I took one last parting shot and when I got home I discovered that there was an odd ring around the stone that looked strangely like a ritualistic type of marking). The ring made me think of the rumors of strange rituals that used to take place in the cemetery. It is rumored that a cult known as the Crabbites used the Stepp Cemetery as their sacred place to practice their rituals (which were said to be highly sexual in nature). Is this still happening? Why would anyone want to go out there and light candles and stand within a concentric ring? Were they chanting and hoping to summon a spirit? I wonder if they were successful?

We traveled through the cemetery and I began snapping shots of tombstones and old gnarly trees and lots of trash and signs of vandalism. There was a lot of trash: beer cans and bottles, candy wrappers, pop bottles and Styrofoam cups. It was as though the people who had been out there didn't care one iota about the fact that this was a sacred place of the dead, and that it deserves a certain respect, a reverence for the dead, and that they should have enough common sense to pack any trash back out with them and not just tossing it down on the ground. Traces and signs of vandalism were abundant. There was damage to the stone at the entrance to the cemetery (someone had intentionally tried to deface it), there was a plate missing from one of a pair of bronze grave markers, and there was graffiti, and broken tombstones, and stolen artifacts.

Vandalism isn't new to the Stepp Cemetery, however it seems to be getting worse with the new influx of visitors. There was a report that someone had once tried to dig into one of the graves back in the 1960s, digging







nearly five feet into the ground before leaving their endeavor unfinished, and abandoning the dig for unknown reasons. In the 1970s some of the tombstones from the Stepp Cemetery were found in the Martinsville High School parking lot. Around that same time frame, a dog was found dead and hanging from a tree, and later the police caught up with some juveniles who, when they were questioned about the incident, said that they had found a dead dog and thought it would be fun to scare people by hanging it from a tree.

The true death of "The Legend of Stepp Cemetery" came several years ago when Olethia Walls made it public (to dispel the myth once and for all and to make public her annoyance at the disrespect and damage that visitors were bringing to the cemetery) that she was the mother of "Baby Lester" and that she wasn't the "The Lady in Black" and hence there could be no such thing. She said that back in 1937 she gave birth to a stillborn son, baby Lester, and that she and her husband, Harley Lester, had the baby buried out in the Stepp Cemetery. She added as a side note that she did have long white hair, but that she didn't ever wear black. Her testimony killed the myth, because no one could refute what she had said. The myth was dead. Olethia died shortly after she made it public and now she might really be the "Lady in Black." Who's to say? Or is the myth really dead?

Another source from a blog on the Internet claims that the "warlock seat" out in the cemetery is nothing more than some fancy chainsaw carving work done by a relative. It seems that Olethia, and another gentlemen that was drunk, thought it would be neat to fashion the tree or stump into a chair, so he grabbed his chainsaw and went to work carving out the throne. This drove another nail into the coffin of the myth of the Stepp Cemetery.

The real story is that Terry Walls, who's family is buried in the cemetery, joined together with some of her other living relatives and they began taking care of the cemetery over 70 years ago. Prison inmates used to go out there and take care of it, but when they stopped the place was quickly overgrown and that was a prime opportunity for vandals and thrill seekers alike. So, Terry and the others started going out there and caring for the cemetery grounds. They were partly responsible for creating the myth because they would often times hide in the woods and play pranks on visitors to the cemetery.

The stump myth started when William Walls and his brother, Ralph, who owned a sawmill, saw that a tree was

dying in the cemetery and needed to be cut down. They thought it would be fun to carve the stump into a seat so that visitors would have a place to sit. Later he said that he regretted doing that because it expedited the vandalism and destruction of the cemetery, according to Terry Walls. The stump eventually began to rot and they had it removed. Ralph Walls died in 1981 and is now buried in the cemetery. This is another nail in the coffin of the legend of the Stepp Cemetery.

The modern day story teller believes that the stump is out there still. There is a stump presently near "Baby Lester's" grave, however it is not the stump that was carved into a chair by the Walls brothers. The "Lady in Black" could theoretically sit on any stump that she liked, so perhaps she sits on any stump that she wants to, or maybe she had a new stump made for her . . . and the new stump is even closer to "Baby Lester's" grave.

Lastly, a man named John Findly claims much of the responsibility for encouraging the myth and mystery that surrounds the Stepp Cemetery. During the summer of 1966 he and his friend, Jack Abram, spent a few weeks out haunting the cemetery pulling pranks on unsuspecting visitors. They hung a dummy from a tree that looked like the "Lady in Black" and they set booby traps that simulated movement in the brush and they made howling noises and basically scared the daylights out of the visitors (a group of kids took off as if they had seen a ghost, Findly is noted to say) and eventually the news spread and the popularity of the Stepp Cemetery exploded until it was impossible for Findly to pull any more pranks.

In conclusion, the Stepp Cemetery is steeped in legend and myth and, although much of the facts are out and the myth should be dead, people still want to believe in the stories. Even when there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary, new generations of story tellers recreate the legend and spin a new yarn that incorporates the modern with the historical and the legend doesn't truly die. Why? We need to have these scary stories . . . it is mithridate. It helps us to cope with the unknown. I, for one, do not want to see the legend of the Stepp Cemetery breath its last. I like the place; it is peaceful, quiet and pleasant, and it is just a really nice place to go out and visit with a bygone era and pay some respect to those who have gone into the void before me.











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